

“Hands off Students’ Rights”: Student parliament at Humboldt University rejects law targeting critical students

IYSSE at Humboldt University
26 April 2024

On Wednesday, the student parliament (StuPa) at Humboldt University (HU) in Berlin voted by a large majority against the reintroduction of a regulatory law at Berlin’s universities. The adopted motion stated that the Berlin Senate’s draft law “stands in the tradition of the expulsion of politically unwelcome students” during the Nazi era and aims to criminalise “legitimate democratic protest culture at universities.” The StuPa therefore encouraged the student council, the legally recognised student representative body, to “agitate against the reintroduction of the regulatory law.”

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) has described the regulatory law as an attempt to whip universities into line and to reintroduce the principle of thought crimes. A week ago, around 500 students demonstrated in Berlin against the de-registration clause. It is of great significance that the HU StuPa has now also rejected this attack and thus defended the right of students to protest against war, genocide and capitalism on campus.

HU President Julia von Blumenthal, on the other hand, publicly supported the Senate’s initiative in advance, and advocated the reintroduction of a stricter regulatory law. On Wednesday, she appeared before the student parliament to reaffirm her anti-democratic position in the face of critical questions.

In her speech, Blumenthal made it explicitly clear that expulsion and other regulatory measures could be applied to take action against lecture hall occupations and political assemblies that were not coordinated with university management. As an example, she cited the occupation of the Institute of Social Sciences on the occasion of the dismissal of the popular sociology

lecturer Andrej Holm in 2017. She said that management wants to take legal action against such and other “protests that are not within the limit of criminal liability,” regardless of the courts. These powers were to be “framed in accordance with the rule of law” and “applied proportionately,” she claimed absurdly.

Subsequently, the StuPa deputy Gregor Kahl for the IYSSE responded in a speech to the President’s remarks:

Dear Ms. von Blumenthal, You have publicly announced and confirmed once again that you would like to reintroduce the right to regulate students, including the possibility to expel students under certain pretexts. The wording in the bill is so vague that students can already be expelled due to forms of political protests such as unauthorised lecture hall occupations or prohibited slogans.

This is not an oversight, but the deliberate political thrust of this measure. It aims directly at silencing the widespread opposition to the genocide in Gaza in the universities. In addition, the law is intended to create the conditions for criminalising any student opposition to war and the right-wing policies of the government.

Anyone who has doubts about this assessment or considers it exaggerated should take a look at the events in the United States. There, mass protests against the massacre in Gaza are currently taking place at many of the country’s most prestigious universities, with tens of thousands taking part. Hundreds of peacefully

protesting students were arrested and dozens were expelled. At NYU alone, police have arrested 130 students and supporters. Democratic and Republican leaders are now even calling for the use of the National Guard against our fellow students – the same National Guard that in 1970 wounded 13 Kent State University students with firearms and killed four of them during protests against the US invasion of Cambodia.

Ms. von Blumenthal, when you last spoke in front of the student parliament in February last year, I addressed the crucial role that Humboldt University has played for years for German war propaganda. I asked you what you will do to protect critical students from right-wing violence. You never responded to me. In the meantime, security for students has not improved, but deteriorated. Right-wing groups and individuals have a free hand to destroy student material at this university and foment a climate of intimidation.

And now, a year later, it must be noted that not only do you continue to do nothing to defend students against right-wing attacks, but with the reintroduction of the regulatory law, you are carrying out the sharpest attack on the democratic rights of students so far. While a professor at this university can state that “Hitler was not vicious” and the Holocaust was “basically the same” as “shootings during the Russian civil war,” it is to be made possible to expel students in the future if they oppose the politics of war and genocide.

You speak of dialogue and exchange here in the student parliament, but you refuse to engage in any serious dialogue. Instead, you threaten to kick critical students out of the university. You have not even ruled on an official complaint that has existed for years against Mr Baberowski for physically assaulting one of our deputies and insulting and threatening others, although you are legally obliged to do so.

With this balance sheet, I do not expect you to address these points. That is why I appeal to all Members who are here today to vote against the regulatory law today. This attempt to transform

Berlin’s universities into subservient forgers of military cadre must absolutely be stopped. And I call on all fellow students to protest against this. We must turn to the international working class, the vast majority of the population, to repel these attacks – in the US, in Germany and around the world.

During the debate on the student parliament’s position, by which time the president had left, Kahl stressed that the law was directed against any form of student opposition to right-wing government policy. The push must be seen in the context of the reactions to the mass protests in the United States and Germany’s return to a policy of war and genocide.

The president’s attempt to disguise the regulatory law in her speech as an instrument in the fight against violence and sexual assault was decisively rejected by several speakers. With the exception of RCDS and Jusos, the youth organisations of the Christian Democratic Union and Social Democrats respectively, all student lists voted against the law at the end of the debate.



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