No censorship of anti-war events! Defend freedom of expression at Berlin's Humboldt University!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE)
10 June 2025

While the German government is massively rearming, reintroducing conscription and supporting genocide in Gaza, the Humboldt University administration is prohibiting students from protesting against it. It has banned the IYSSE, which is represented by five members in the student parliament, from holding anti-war events on campus.

Until now, university groups and student initiatives have been able to organise political events at the university without any problems. The IYSSE has held dozens of events against militarism and the threat of war over the past 10 years, often with hundreds of participants and always involving controversial discussions. Now, the university administration claims that students have no right to discuss general political issues at the university. Instead, they must limit themselves to "study and university policy issues."

In doing so, it is replacing Humboldt's educational ideal with Wilhelmine authoritarianism: Humboldt professors constantly spread right-wing and militaristic views on all channels, the university administration has backed the war preparations against Russia and the genocide in Gaza, but students are supposed to keep their mouths shut and consume whatever is served up to them. Events may only be held during cafeteria mealtimes or library opening hours!

We cannot accept this! We call on all students and everyone who defends democratic rights to send protest emails to University President Julia von Blumenthal (praesidentin@hu-berlin.de, with a copy to iysse@gleichheit.de). Come to our regular meetings, every Wednesday at 7 p.m. in room 1.608 in Doro 24, to discuss the issues and prepare further protests.

The question is whether our university is a place of critical debate or whether it is degenerating into a militaristic training ground for future leaders. In the USA, the right-wing Trump administration is trying to force Harvard and other universities into line—and some university administrations have at least protested against this. The administration of Humboldt University, on the other hand, is following its historical tradition of self-imposed conformity and, in a rush to obey, is suppressing student criticism of the Merz government's pro-war policy.

Humboldt University has long since become a central player in the preparation for war and the militarisation of society. With the right-wing extremist Professor Jörg Baberowski and the emeritus but still omnipresent Professor Herfried Münkler, two protagonists of ideological war preparations are spreading their militaristic propaganda here.

Münkler has long called for an ideological offensive to overcome the rejection of pro-war policies among the population. At the last Leipzig Book Fair, he bitterly lamented that too few people in Germany were willing to die as supposed heroes in a war.

His colleague Baberowski trivialises the crimes of the Nazis. He has claimed that Adolf Hitler was "not vicious" and justified the Nazis' war of extermination as a "defensive reaction" against the Soviet Union, which had made "mass violence second nature."

Potsdam professor Sönke Neitzel recently argued in the *taz* that Germany needed a "democratic warrior" trained to "fight, kill and die." He cited the "soldier cultures" of Hitler's Wehrmacht (Army), which he said gave soldiers "identity, cohesion and motivation" as a model.

The Humboldt University administration has repeatedly defended these professors against student criticism and has even refused to condemn, let alone punish,

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Baberowski's physical attack on one of our Student Parliament representatives.

The university presidium itself is fully involved in war propaganda. In September 2023, for example, Blumenthal opened an exhibition on the war in Ukraine in the middle of the main foyer, which consisted exclusively of atrocity propaganda and was intended to prevent "gradually declining support" for Ukraine from spreading among the German public, as Blumenthal herself put it. Her hope was that the university could help to "create a different awareness." Blumenthal had previously invited Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to the university to drum up support for a full-scale war against Russia.

Humboldt University has taken an equally clear position on the genocide in Gaza. Student protests have been brutally suppressed with the help of the police, and the campus temporarily turned into a police fortress. All those who even mention the genocide of the Palestinians by name are not allowed to hold events or organise protests.

The IYSSE has denounced and fought this process of the university's militarisation for over 10 years—with leaflets, posters and events. As a result, we have been elected to the Student Parliament every year, most recently with almost 8 percent of the vote and five seats.

Now the university administration wants to ban this political work from campus so that it has free rein for its militaristic indoctrination and war propaganda. It has banned two events that the IYSSE had planned as part of the Student Parliament elections: "A Socialist Perspective Against the War Machine" and "How the Left Party Supports the War Policy of the Merz Government."

We are only being allowed to hold the third event, "80 Years Since the End of the War: The Return of German Militarism and the Trivialisation of Nazi Crimes at Humboldt University," which will take place July 1 at 6:30 p.m. in Lecture Hall 2094, Main Building.

In other words, the events that are being banned are precisely those that critically examine the war policies of the Merz government and its support by the other parties in the Bundestag (parliament). The fact that the university administration is resorting to cowardly censorship shows how weak its position is. The insane policies of the federal government, a grand coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD), are hated by broad sections of the population in view of the historical experience of fascism, world war and the Holocaust.

The Merz government is determined to increase military spending to 5 percent of gross domestic product, as will be decided at the NATO summit on June 24. That is €225 billion, almost half of the current federal budget. We will have to bear the costs through cuts in health, education and social services. The government's declared goal is to be in a position to win a war against the nuclear power Russia within five years. That is why it wants to reintroduce conscription and turn us into cannon fodder in such madness.

This militarisation of society is incompatible with democratic rights and a critical university. That is why opponents of war face increasingly harsh repression, why the university administration is censoring critical events—and why it is necessary to oppose censorship and defend critical debate at our university.

In the fight against war and militarism and for the defence of democratic rights, we students cannot rely on any of the parties in the Bundestag, all of which support the policies of the federal government. Instead, we must turn to the social force that alone is capable of overcoming war and its root cause, capitalism: the international working class, which creates all social wealth and bears the burden of war and crisis. Only by breaking the power of the banks and corporations and placing them under democratic control can we prevent another catastrophe.

We therefore call on all students: Defend the IYSSE against the censorship measures of the university administration! Send protest emails to University President Julia von Blumenthal (praesidentin@hu-berlin.de, with a copy to iysse@gleichheit.de) and come to our next meeting on Wednesday, June 18, at 7 p.m. in room 1.608 in Doro 24 to discuss this perspective with us.

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