“No cuts!”—Protest at Frankfurt’s Goethe University against the devastation of education

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“No cuts!”—under this slogan, around 300 employees, students, professors, lecturers and research staff gathered on Tuesday, November 3, for an information event in the lecture hall building of Goethe University in Frankfurt’s Westend district. The university’s executive board had issued the invitation under the title “Goethe let’s talk,” but there was great anger and unrest among those present.

Shortly beforehand, the details of the executive board’s new package of cuts had become known. A 59-page paper, initially leaked only to the media, has since also been made available to members of the university on the intranet. According to this document, Goethe University is to be completely restructured within five years. Of the 600 professorships, around 60 are to be axed, the number of faculties halved and several institutes closed. Many staff on fixed-term contracts will lose their jobs in the coming months. As one of them told the *Frankfurter Rundschau* after the meeting, “The executive board explicitly admitted today that it cannot offer any prospects for employees on fixed-term contracts.”

The devastating cuts are the direct result of the reductions that Hesse’s state Science Minister Timon Gremmels (Social Democrats, SPD) and State Premier Boris Rhein (Christian Democrats, CDU) decided on last year. The “Hesse Higher Education Pact 2026–2031” was signed on July 17, 2025. It covers the state’s 14 public universities and provides for budget cuts of €30 million for 2026 alone.

For the winter semester that has just begun, Goethe University has already reduced the number of study places by 455—almost 10 percent of the roughly 4,600 new students admitted the previous year. Hirings and professorial appointments have been suspended, and severe savings are being made in the staffing, materials and investment budgets.

Yet the Higher Education Pact is not the only reason for the slash-and-burn policy at one of Germany’s largest and most renowned universities. Speaking to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (*FAZ*), university President Enrico Schleiff stressed, “We would have initiated the development process arising from the Higher Education Pact even without the pressure to make savings.” His plans go far beyond the demands of the pact. The concept presented internally on October 21 envisages as strategic priorities a concentration on digitalisation and artificial intelligence, as well as a research alliance with the University of Mainz and the Technical University of Darmstadt.

The existing 16 faculties are to be turned into seven, with smaller institutes dissolved and large, comprehensive faculties created. In the humanities alone, at least 18 professorships are to go, and five faculties are to be reduced to two. One of the two is to be called “History, Culture and Religion” and will merge history with philosophy, religious and cultural studies, the theologies and classical studies. The second, under the title “Literature, Language and Art,” is to comprise modern and East Asian philologies, African studies, musicology, art history and art education.

The plans are meeting with broad criticism, which increasingly raises fundamental questions. But the money is obviously there. The Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) and the arms companies are raking in vast sums, and the DAX stock index is climbing to one record high after another, while massive cuts are being

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made to higher education and education as a whole.

Nine Frankfurt sociology professors, including Stephan Lessenich, director of the Institute for Social Research, have also sharply criticised the cuts. In an open letter, they denounced "the scandalous casualisation of academic and administrative employment, the erosion of core funding in favour of 'flagship projects,' the downgrading of students to factors in a business cost-benefit calculation, the forced erosion of the unity of research and teaching, the by now routine undermining of academic self-governance."

They had remained silent long enough, they wrote, but "In recent months, conditions at German universities, and especially at Goethe University, have come to a head in a way that makes further professorial silence possible only at the quite obvious price of either self-abandonment or the denial of reality."

They went on to write that Goethe University was on the way to becoming an "academically gutted, downright anti-scholarly 'lean university,'" guided by "management strategies and governance illusions borrowed from outdated textbooks." In doing so, the executive board was ignoring the "challenges—from the neo-fascist, systematic subversion of democratic institutions to the further intensified plundering of the foundations of existence." Finally, the professors committed themselves to fighting for adequate education funding and for the "renegotiation of the Hesse Higher Education Pact, for the unity of research and teaching, and for a democratic and anti-fascist university."

On October 31, hundreds of Goethe University students took part in the Gen Z protests. One orgy of cuts after another has provoked protests not only at Goethe University but also at many other universities in Hesse and across Germany.

In Kassel, students recently occupied their university to resist the scrapping of the civil clause (*Zivilklausel*)—the university's self-imposed commitment that its research and teaching must serve exclusively civilian purposes. The university responded with a brutal police operation. As the WSWS has reported, the senate of the University of Kassel is seeking to abolish the civil clause in order to enable closer collaboration with the arms industry, with Rheinmetall and KNDS, in a city that is a major centre of arms production.

The protests at the universities are part of the growing youth movement throughout Europe which is directed both against the social devastation and the education emergency and against the extremely dangerous militarisation of society. This movement is international and is developing largely outside the trade unions and establishment parties. Neither Die Linke (Left Party) nor the education union GEW has so far organised any effective action beyond the regional level. In alliance with the capitalist state, they reject any independent movement of workers and young people.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth and student organisation of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and the International Committee of the Fourth International, therefore calls on all students who seriously want to fight the devastating cuts at the universities to familiarise themselves with Marxism and the socialist strategy against war and capitalism. The decisive task is to unite the protests and struggles of young people with those of the international working class and to work consciously for the overthrow of the capitalist system.

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