

# IYSSE protests censorship at Berlin's Humboldt University

10 October 2014

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) has requested a lecture room at the Humboldt University of Berlin for a meeting under the title "Why do the German elites once again want war?" The IYSSE has called this meeting amidst an intense campaign by the government, leading politicians, the media and prominent academics for a revival of German militarism and the active involvement in international conflicts.

Seeking to block public debate on this development and criticism of members of the Humboldt faculty who are prominently involved in this pro-war campaign, the university administration has stated that the lecture room application will be approved only if the IYSSE agrees to extreme restrictions on what it says and writes.

A letter from the Head of Office Hans-Christoph Keller states that Humboldt's approval of a lecture is "subject to the condition that prior to, during and after the meeting, members of the University are not once again maligned, e.g. on leaflets, posters, the Internet, or otherwise reviled as militarists and warmongers, as was the case at an IYSSE meeting in mid-July. Such forms of polemic contradict the academic principles of a university, which deals with controversial issues on a purely scientific basis. Violations of this principle will not be tolerated by the university administration."

The IYSSE rejects this illegal attempt to suppress constitutionally protected political speech. It has sent the following reply to the President of HU, Prof. Dr. Jan-Hendrik Olbertz and to Herr Keller:

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Berlin, 08.10.2014

Dear Prof. Dr. Olbertz, Mr. Keller,

On October 1, the IYSSE university group at Humboldt University, with the explicit support of the student representatives association, requested

permission to use a room at the university to conduct a meeting devoted to the theme "Why do the German elites once again want war?" In your letter dated October 7, you attach totally unacceptable conditions to the use of the room.

You write: "This approval is, however, subject to the condition that prior to, during and after the meeting, members of the University are not once again maligned, e.g. on leaflets, posters, the Internet, or otherwise reviled as militarists and warmongers, as was the case at an IYSSE meeting in mid-July."

We categorically reject these conditions and will not accept them under any circumstances. The claims you make are baseless.

On what legal basis do you impose such conditions, which clearly restrict freedom of expression? The Basic Law (Art. 5) states: "Every person shall have the right freely to express and disseminate his opinions in speech, writing and pictures....There shall be no censorship."

Why, 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, are you reintroducing political censorship?

The IYSSE has never insulted, maligned or in any other way personally attacked members of the university. We have, however, dealt critically with the right-wing political standpoints advanced by some members of the university, and will continue to do.

We have been informed that Professor Jörg Baberowski made representations to the university administration and intervened to oppose our right to hold meetings. Prof. Baberowski himself represents far right political views, not only within the sphere of academic teaching, but also at public meetings and in the media.

On February 10, 2014, *Der Spiegel* quoted him as saying: "Hitler was no psychopath, and he wasn't vicious. He didn't want people to talk about the

extermination of the Jews at his table.” In the same *Spiegel* article he defends Ernst Nolte, whose aim is to rehabilitate Hitler: "Nolte was done an injustice. Historically speaking he was right.”

At a panel discussion at the German Historical Museum last week, titled “Interventionsmacht Deutschland?” (Germany as Intervention Force?), Baberowski argued that the illegal methods associated with wars of annihilation be used against organisations such as the Afghan Taliban and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. His exact words were: “And if one is not willing to take hostages, burn villages, hang people and spread fear and terror, as the terrorists do, if one is not prepared to do such things, then one can never win such a conflict and it is better to keep out altogether.”(1)

As a student group at the Humboldt University, we consider it not only our right but also our duty to oppose and condemn such views. This in no way stands in contradiction to the discussion of “controversial issues on a purely scientific basis” as stated in your letter. Rather, it forms its very essence.

If anyone is violating the democratic principles of scientific debate, it is Prof. Baberowski himself. As we pointed out to you in a previous letter on February 22, Prof. Baberowski canceled a public colloquium at the Department of the History of Eastern Europe on spurious grounds and then shifted the meeting to another room to exclude, with the help of security personnel, critics of his views and prevent a serious and critical discourse about the biography of Trotsky written by Robert Service (2).

Prof. Baberowski has used every opportunity inside and outside of academia to spread his right-wing views, while at the same time employing administrative measures to suppress contrary opinions. This recalls the darkest days of German history when opponents of war were prosecuted and criminalized.

October 3 was the 125th birthday of Carl von Ossietzky. The censoring of his articles against militarism and war and his subsequent imprisonment were integral to the Nazi preparations to take power and the onset of the Second World War. Compliant academics such as Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt, who taught at the Friedrich-Wilhelms University from the fall of 1933, played an important role in this regard.

You request compliance with academic principles.

This requires that students oppose and prevent all attempts at intimidation and suppression of freedom of expression to prevent Humboldt University from being transformed into a pro-militarist institution, i.e., into a German equivalent of the US Hoover Institute.

We therefore urge you to immediately withdraw the conditions you have attached to the room allocation.

With best regards, the university group of the IYSSE at HU Berlin

*Notes:*

1) An audio recording (in German) of the DHM discussion can be found here. The quote from Prof. Baberowski starts at 20:25.

2) Berlin IYSSE protests Professor Jörg Baberowski’s suppression of democratic discussion at Humboldt University

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>