

Humboldt University Professor Sandkühler's response to the IYSSE: A declaration of intellectual bankruptcy

By International Youth and Students for Social Equality
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The Humboldt University chapter of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) protested in a November 12 open letter to Humboldt University Professor Thomas Sandkühler against assertions and attacks he made in a posting on the Moodle web site for the event titled "Introduction to history didactics." The IYSSE received the following response:

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

I not only posted the statement you criticised on the page "Introduction to history didactics," but also in my additional courses. My students are not children who can be intimidated with such letters.

I have no inclination to comply with your demand that I remove my statement. That you find it "shameful" is your problem. Your campaign is repugnant to me; your actions are outrageous, period.

In a democratic state, everyone who considers himself to have been slandered has the right to take legal action. So you can sue me. I have nothing to withdraw or alter.

With best regards,

Th. Sandkühler

In response to this answer, the Humboldt University chapter of the IYSSE states:

Mr. Sandkühler's reply is a declaration of intellectual bankruptcy and speaks volumes about the state of the Institute of History at Humboldt University. As students at the institute and elected student

representatives, we protested against an insulting declaration, exposed outrageous lies about the IYSSE, and, above all, raised very serious political and historical questions. In the course of six pages, we presented and documented in detail how Mr. Baberowski has downplayed Nazi crimes and agitated against refugees.

Mr. Sandkühler does not consider himself able to deal with the content of even one of these issues, or to challenge even one of our arguments. He does not deem it necessary to apologise for his obvious lies. This is not only pathetic, but reflects his authoritarian predilections.

The letter exposes a deep contempt for democratic rights and a free university. Mr. Sandkühler believes he has the right as a professor to use the university's official study platform to spread insults and lies about critical students in his own institute. When students call him to account for this and justify their criticisms in detail, he describes such actions as "outrageous, period." Is it now once again "outrageous" to criticise far-right positions advanced by professors? Is a response to students of "period" sufficient?

It is significant that this is now the third statement against the IYSSE in which Mr. Sandkühler has been involved. But the accusations against the IYSSE have never been backed up with evidence. If our critique dealt in slanders, it should have been an easy task for a professor of history to demonstrate which citations we falsified, which context we ignored or what facts we omitted. Instead, Mr. Sandkühler has repeatedly attempted to exploit his authority as a professor to administratively silence us.

Such an obsequious attitude to authority made

possible the integration of the universities into the machinery of the First World War and, ultimately, National Socialism. Sandkühler is an example of how the same authoritarian personality, who bows to his superiors only to trample on those below with even more force, is preparing the way for the growth of the far right. With “Professor Period,” one feels compelled to recall the caricatures of George Grosz or Heinrich Mann’s “Untertan,” who sought to avoid military service, but only to advocate war all the more.

These issues are not merely historical. They are highly contemporary. In the United States, a semi-fascist is currently taking over as president. Among other things, he has announced the deportation of millions of immigrants and the building of a wall on the border with Mexico.

Trump has also appointed the right-wing extremist Stephen Bannon as his chief adviser. Between 2012 and 2016, Bannon was the editor-in-chief of Breitbart News, the far-right web site that praised Baberowski for his agitation against refugees [1] and now plans to expand to Germany. For his part, Baberowski has hailed the authoritarian, police state measures taken by former New York Mayor and Trump supporter Rudolph Giuliani as “terrific.” [2] Giuliani campaigned for Trump and is now part of his transition team.

There can no longer be any doubt that Baberowski is advocating a similar regime in Germany. And despite this, not a single professor has dared to even criticise Baberowski publicly. Not when he downplayed the Nazis’ crimes, not when he agitated against refugees, and not even when he called for critical students to be thrown out of the university. Instead, professors have stepped up their backing for Baberowski and condemned all criticism of him.

Such behaviour should never again be tolerated at Humboldt University. The university’s statement of general principles explicitly rejects “subservience to authority” and “caste-type arrogance.” The statement declares that the university is an institution “which has determined to assume a critical distance from political and social power. It opposes any form of discrimination, intolerance or cultural elitism.” [3]

Baberowski opposes such principles with his right-wing agenda, and Mr. Sandkühler has given his backing with his statement. The fact that there has been no protest from within the professoriate to Mr.

Baberowski’s positions and Mr. Sandkühler’s authoritarian behaviour only underscores the importance of the IYSSE’s work. We therefore call on all students to attend our meetings and support our activities.

Notes:

[1] Raheem Kassam, “Left Historian: ‘Christian Germany... Everything dear to us... will disappear because of mass migration,’” Breitbart News, 07/12/2015,

<http://www.breitbart.com/london/2015/12/07/left-historian-christian-germany-everything-dear-to-us-will-disappear-because-of-mass-migration/>

[2] Joachim Steinhöfel meets Professor Dr. Jörg Baberowski, clip begins at 3:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QPFV4QxupE>

[3] General Principles of Humboldt University, adopted on 13/02/2002, <https://www.hu-berlin.de/de/ueberblick/humboldt-universitaet-zu-berlin/leitbild/standardseite/>

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>