

Student representative body denounces right-wing positions of professors at Berlin's Humboldt University

By our correspondents
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Opposition is growing among students at Berlin's Humboldt University to right-wing professors at the university. The assembly of student representative councils (FRIV), which speaks for the students of all departments at the university, has adopted a resolution entitled "Statement against right-wing positions in teaching," thereby taking a clear stand against militarism and anti-immigrant chauvinism, and in support of freedom of opinion at the university.

"Racist, nationalist, anti-Semitic, sexist and militarist positions, like other forms of discrimination, have no place in teaching or research," the statement declares. It goes on to assert that in recent times "instructors at HU have put forward such positions or relativised them on university campuses and at public events.

The FRIV explicitly refers to the "right-wing and in part openly inhumane standpoint" of three professors: Professor of English Markus Egg, Professor of political theory Herfried Münkler, and occupant of the chair of Eastern European history Jörg Baberowski.

The latter is currently suing the student body at the University of Bremen because its General Student Committee cited and criticised his right-wing positions. The FRIV statement makes clear that students have no intention of being silenced. It states, "We support the right of all students to criticise their teachers and be taken seriously and acknowledged in their criticism."

The FRIV first deals with the positions of Professor Egg, who, alongside his activities as a professor, is an active member of the ultra-right, anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany party (AfD). In his position as chairman of the AfD's Berlin committee for education, Egg jointly drafted a "10-point plan for professional training." In it, he demanded, according to the FRIV

statement, "the exclusion of broad sections of the population from higher education." He also spoke out against the "forced acceptance of feminist content or civilian provisions against potentially militarily relevant research." The FRIV resolution states, "We decisively reject these positions."

The FRIV criticises Münkler's positions as "nationalistic and militaristic." In his 2015 book *Power at the Centre*, Münkler demanded, according to the FRIV, "a transformation of Germany from 'paymaster' to the 'disciplinarian' of Europe," and described Germany as a "hegemon." In addition, "he relativised German guilt for the First World War in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*," downplayed in interviews the use of poison gas as a "humane weapon," and legitimised drone attacks.

The FRIV statement also takes aim at the right-wing positions of Professor Jörg Baberowski. He "agitates publicly against refugees and relativises National Socialist [Nazi] crimes in his research," the FRIV resolution states. By portraying "the majority of immigrants as a 'burden' on the social state," he encourages "diffuse feelings of fear and exploits refugees as scapegoats for social problems." According to the FRIV, he "on the one hand never grows tired of accusing refugees of 'aggressiveness,' while, on the other, he downplays violence against refugees and refugee accommodation centres."

The FRIV also opposes Baberowski's downplaying in his academic publications of "Nazi war crimes in the Soviet Union as an inevitable reaction to the war waged by the Red Army and the partisans." These "provocative positions" are "extremely dangerous, especially when they are spread under a

pseudo-academic garb,” the statement declares.

The student representative body accuses the university administration of operating on the basis of a “double standard.” While right-wing professors such as Münkler, Baberowski and Egg are defended against criticism, left-leaning instructors such as Andrej Holm are fired.

The FRIV is here referring to the case of sociologist Andrej Holm, who was fired as an academic at Humboldt when it emerged that he had begun basic training with the Stasi [East German Stalinist secret police] from September 1989 to January 1990. The firing was subsequently changed to a warning after Holm apologised for not having made a full disclosure when he was hired.

The FRIV statement underscores that a majority of students oppose the professors’ reactionary positions and the transformation of Humboldt University into a right-wing centre of militarism, as well as the general rightward lurch of the political establishment.

Already in the summer of 2015, the student parliament at Humboldt passed a resolution in defence of freedom of opinion for students. In the resolution, the parliament explicitly called on students “to express yourselves politically, question authority, and oppose, above all with regard to the content of courses at the university, tendencies that downplay Germany’s inhumane history.”

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