

Student general assembly at Berlin's Humboldt University agrees to fight against cuts and militarism

IYSSE at Humboldt University, Berlin
3 February 2025

Last week, a general assembly initiated by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Berlin's Humboldt University (HU), in which over 100 students took part, agreed to intensify and expand the fight against the austerity plans of the Berlin Senate (state executive).

The resolution explicitly establishes a connection between the general attack on education and scholarship and the militarisation of the entire society promoted by the federal and state governments: "Cooperation with military institutions and research that could benefit them must be explicitly excluded. The cost-cutting measures adopted by the Senate [Berlin state executive] must not lead to the militarisation of the university." To this end, the resolution calls for an amendment to the university constitution.

Student Parliament (StuPa) representatives from the IYSSE took part in the panel discussion, as well as representatives of university employees, the Student Union and numerous students from the audience.

Marcel, social affairs officer of the Student Union, spoke of an "attack on all students" with the aim of "making universities more exclusive and promoting social inequality." While student fees were set to rise massively, there was a threat of counselling and childcare being discontinued by Student Services, entire degree programmes being abolished and meal prices in canteens increased by 30 percent, he said.

A third of the Student Services funding has already been cut. In total, the Senate wanted to save €3 billion this year and at least another €2 billion next year. Hundreds of millions of euros are to be cancelled from current university contracts. By asking the universities

to reduce their reserves, the Senate was further increasing their political dependency, said Marcel.

"The universities have their backs to the wall, they are threatened with no longer being able to guarantee education," explained Constanze Baum, spokesperson for the academic mid-level faculty and member of the Academic Senate (AS) at Humboldt University (HU). "A large proportion of our teaching staff and research assistants are employed on a temporary basis and can only hope to one day gain one of the contested professorships. Many people have no idea what the cuts mean for each individual: job cuts, fewer seminars, colleagues are double and triple overloaded and have to support their families with a two-thirds position. We are worried that we will lose entire subjects."

Josta Hamann, AS spokesperson for HU employees in technology and administration, reported that entire university buildings had already had to be closed due to the cuts and stated: "We already have precarious working conditions and are also facing job cuts. The quality of teaching is suffering, internships are no longer feasible, the building fabric is dilapidated—many things are simply no longer manageable. We have to think about the contract bargaining negotiations in the autumn and put pressure on the Senate to reverse the cuts overall."

A first-semester student in the master's degree programme in Public Health reported that he may have to return to his home country because all public funding for the programme has been cut, and its continuation is in question. There is a similar threat to subjects such as Italian and Japanese Studies.

Jana Judisch, spokesperson for Student Services, said: "We are really angry. A third of our budget is already

gone, even though we have a renovation backlog in the hundreds of millions in the halls of residence alone. You as students are being served the bill for this. There has never been anything like it in 50 years. If such cuts happen again, as planned by the Senate, then we will no longer exist. Then we'll be out of the picture. We have to protest together and make a real ruckus. Education is a public good!"

The completely bankrupt perspective of the Verdi trade union was summarised by Julia Dück, union secretary for universities and archives in Berlin. She said, "We have to ask ourselves what we can do in view of the situation. The university management has already commissioned a legal opinion stating that no cuts can be made to current contracts. They could take legal action against this. They should play this card; it's the best lever we have at the moment. But for that we need pressure from below." This pressure on university management and the political parties behind the cuts should be exerted by a large demonstration in Berlin shortly before the federal elections, she said.

HU student and IYSSE StuPa representative Tamino disagreed with this perspective: "We initiated this plenary assembly because we believe we should not see the cuts as purely a matter for the universities, but as part of the biggest social cuts in Germany. It is part of the military rearmament and war. This plenary assembly must be the start of a movement that is directed against these attacks. We must unite with workers in the cultural sector, in industry—where mass redundancies are currently taking place—in the care sector and other areas. We propose setting up working groups to coordinate this movement."

IYSSE spokesperson Gregor added, "The cuts are part of the class struggle. The billionaires and multimillionaires are enriching themselves from the education cuts—just as they are enriching themselves from the war in Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza. The Senate represents this social class. It supports the federal government, which is channelling hundreds of billions of euros into armaments. We cannot appeal to the understanding of those in power but must turn to our allies in the working class. Rank-and-file action committees must be set up that are independent of the trade union bureaucracy and do not seek a deal with the government. The money for education, health and social services must be taken from the billionaires, the

police and the military who maintain these privileges and enforce them everywhere by force."

Afterwards, a number of students supported the demand to bring together the fight against the cuts with the fight against war, the stepping up of the repressive powers of the state and social inequality, and to extend it to broad sections of working people. "We must not only demand a stop to the cuts, but we must also demand more money—at least twice as much as they want to cut," shouted one student. A second student contradicted the government propaganda that opposition to German arms supplies to Ukraine was tantamount to support for Putin. The demand to cut military and police funding instead of education and training budgets also met with widespread approval.

At a meeting that followed, the HU Student Parliament unanimously endorsed the demands of the general assembly.

We call on all students and staff at the universities in Berlin and worldwide: Take action and form action committees at your institutions and workplaces to confront the social and education cuts! Join the IYSSE!



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