

German academic Jörg Baberowski stirs up hatred against refugees

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In a number of recent articles and interviews, Jörg Baberowski, professor of Eastern European history at Humboldt University in Berlin, has argued for a drastic curtailment of the right to asylum. In doing so, he has employed the kinds of arguments one typically associates with the extreme right. The professor had previously made a name for himself defending Hitler apologist Ernst Nolte and relativizing the war of annihilation waged by the Nazi regime. Now he is intervening in current political debates with his far-right conceptions.

Baberowski began with a guest commentary for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) on September 14. In it he criticizes the “chatter about a welcoming culture” and sharply attacks the refugee policies of the German government from the right. “Naturally, the immigration of 500,000 people annually can be managed technically,” he writes. “But do we want to manage it? No one has posed this question.”

Baberowski answers the question himself with a resounding no. He argues that immigrants from foreign cultures will undermine the foundation of society. “The integration of several million people in a very short time disturbs our traditional continuity which provides social stability and consistency.”

“Mutual experience, what we have read and seen together,” he adds, “is the social cement that once held our society together.”

The racism which underlies this hostility toward other cultures is so blatant that even the fascist National Democratic Party (NPD) has taken note. Their local chapter in Neuruppin has expressed its agreement with the passage in question and posted it on their Facebook page. The monthly NPD newspaper *Deutsche Stimme* (German Voice) dedicated an article in its latest edition to the defense of Baberowski against left-wing critics.

In a manner typical of the radical right, Baberowski attempts to incite the poorest layers of society against immigrants. “Secretaries, construction workers, mothers who only have a little money left in their old age, hairdressers who can’t find an apartment because they don’t make enough money, don’t understand why the social safety net should be available to anyone who hasn’t contributed to its financing,” he writes,

asking, “Why should an immigrant get for free that which those already here have spent decades working so hard for?”

Baberowski practically encourages violence against refugees. During a September 24 discussion on Germany’s 3sat television network, he declared, “Wherever many people come from a foreign context and the population is not involved in solving all of these problems, it naturally leads to aggression.” According to official figures 61 arson attacks on refugee housing took place in the first nine months of this year, in which several homes were completely burned down. Against this backdrop, Baberowski argues, “Given the problem we currently have with immigration in Germany, I think that’s rather harmless.”

The effort to make refugees and immigrants into scapegoats for low wages, social cuts and unemployment is the standard repertoire of the extreme right. It makes up a large part of the propaganda of the National Front in France, the Freedom Party of Austria, the Swiss People’s Party and the German NPD. In adopting these arguments, Baberowski clearly identifies himself with the political far right.

In the 3sat interview, he argues openly for the building of such a party in Germany. According to Baberowski, it is notable “that in countries where there are parties articulating this problem, as in Austria, Switzerland or France, violence against immigrants is much lower. We should perhaps consider that it may help if people simply have a way to vent and talk about these problems.”

Baberowski’s political conclusions are also drawn from the arsenal of the far right. He calls for a virtual elimination of the right to asylum, which was embedded in the German constitution as an answer to the crimes of the Nazi regime. Baberowski claims that with the right to asylum, Germany “gave up its national sovereignty” and let “illegal immigrants decide who can come and who can stay. He insists on speaking of “illegal immigrants” instead of “refugees” to strictly limit immigration and only allow into the country those who would be useful and keep out anyone who “would only be a burden.”

Above all, Baberowski wants to keep out “illiterates.” He arrogantly asks, “Does every immigrant enrich us?” before answering that “Anyone who takes a look at Duisburg-Marxloh or at Görlitzer Park in Berlin-Kreuzberg, will know better.”

Baberowski is well aware that he is putting forward extreme right positions, though he tries to deny it. He angrily denounces all who criticize his reactionary views as well as those who only want to stand up for moral principles and solidarity. While he crudely attacks his enemies, he portrays himself as the victim of a campaign. Here, too, he employs the methods of the radical right who continually insist that they speak for the people, for the majority, for reason and are therefore suppressed. The phrase “There’s no law against saying what one thinks” runs like a red thread through the racist tirades of the far right.

In a September 27 article for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), Baberowski describes Germany as a “republic of virtue,” in which anyone who violates her conventions “is banished to the darkest quarters.” He says, “Level-headedness and rationality are forbidden in the moral high ground which the media has made of Germany. Whoever refers to common sense risks becoming marginalized and ostracized.”

Coming from Baberowski, this accusation is absurd. The Humboldt University professor has at his disposal not only a major professorial chair financed by many third parties, he is also a fixture on talk shows, panel discussions, in newspapers and on television channels. His books are highly publicized. No one has prevented him from spreading his reactionary views.

At the same time, Baberowski has a record of throwing his critics out of public meetings and silencing dissenters. In the summer, he responded to the criticism of students with the demand that the university issue a ban on such “crackpots” and bring charges against them.

Baberowski’s open incitements against refugees confirm what the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) have documented over the last year and a half: that he relativizes the crimes of National Socialism and the war of annihilation waged by the Wehrmacht.

In a February 2014 interview in *Der Spiegel*, Baberowski came out in support of Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte, declaring “Hitler was no psychopath, he was not vicious.” Basing themselves on these and other statements, as well as a careful analysis of his books, the PSG and the IYSSE exposed how Baberowski uses his position as a university lecturer to systematically pursue a deeply reactionary program.

“Such historical falsifications were previously voiced only by ultra-right and fascist circles. Their promotion today is closely linked with the attempts of the German government to revive German militarism,” we write in the foreword to the book *Scholarship or War Propaganda*, which documents the conflict with Baberowski and his colleague Herfried Münkler, and which we strongly recommend to our readers.

The university administration and the media reacted with a storm of defamations without answering or refuting even a single one of the well-documented accusations against Baberowski. The Department of History and the university

administration accused the PSG and the IYSSE of “slander” and “character assassination” and declared that criticism of Baberowski’s public statements would no longer be tolerated “in the halls of Humboldt University.”

FAZ editor Jürgen Kaube attacked the PSG and the IYSSE in an article titled “Mobbing, Trotskyist style.” Friederike Haupt, writing for the same newspaper, compared the criticisms to “bomb threats and appeals for murder.” Some two dozen articles appeared in the NZZ and other media outlets, all of which supported Baberowski.

Now the same newspapers that defended Baberowski then, open up their pages to his xenophobic agitation. It underscores that these networks support Baberowski not as a supposedly respectable academic, but rather as a political operator with a right-wing program. At issue is the attempt to turn the universities into “state-directed cadre-training centers for right-wing and militarist ideologies,” as we write in the previously-cited foreword. Through the falsification of history, the crimes of German imperialism are being relativized and new wars are being prepared.

Far from being a genuine academic Baberowski is in reality a right-wing ideologue. The scholarly content of his pronouncements are worthless. While he has taught for more than 10 years as a professor at Humboldt University, he has failed to produce any work worthy of international attention. His books are filled with errors, falsifications and inconsistencies. His position in academia is entirely due to the political network which has found it useful to engage him as a right-wing agitator.

That an extreme right ideologue like Baberowski teaches at one of the best-known universities in Germany, and is defended by heads of the university and its various departments as well as influential journalists is a clear warning. The ruling elite is working hard to remilitarize German foreign policy and to institute authoritarian forms of rule. Figures like Baberowski have the task of laying the ideological groundwork for militarism—just as they did prior to both world wars.



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