

Third election meeting of IYSSE at Humboldt University

Jörg Baberowski's appeal for dictatorship and war

Our correspondents
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On Wednesday the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Berlin's Humboldt University (HU) held the third meeting of its campaign for the student parliament (StuPa) election which takes place on 19 and 20 January.

In addition to nearly 100 students, two professors of the HU History Institute also attended the meeting which reviewed the latest book by Baberowski, *Räume der Gewalt* (*Spaces of Violence*).

One of the IYSSE candidates for the StuPa election, Katja, opened the meeting by noting the extreme right-wing, anti-refugee positions put forward by Baberowski in numerous interviews and talk shows in recent weeks. She then introduced the main speaker, Christoph Vandreier, spokesman for the IYSSE Germany.

Vandreier is well acquainted with Baberowski's writings. He is the author of the article "Jörg Baberowski's Geschichtsfälschung" ("Jörg Baberowski's Falsification of History") which deals extensively with Baberowski's theoretical and historical conceptions. The article appeared in the book *Wissenschaft statt Kriegspropaganda* (*Scholarship Instead of War Propaganda*), published in Germany by Mehring Verlag in August last year.

At the start of the meeting, Vandreier stressed that the aim of the IYSSE was not to pursue a "personal vendetta" against Baberowski, but rather address a number of disturbing trends at the university. He made clear that the IYSSE had undertaken an objective criticism of Baberowski's attempts to falsify the October Revolution, his de-contextualization of Stalinism and his playing down of the crimes of the Nazis. For his part, Baberowski had sought to repeatedly suppress any discussion of his positions.

"If you look at his new book, which we will discuss today, one realizes how accurate our estimation was," Vandreier declared. "It is a blatant plea for dictatorship and war."

Vandreier explained that his latest book stands in the tradition of the most reactionary thinkers in German history. As was the case with the writings of national conservative circles in the interwar period, Baberowski's book is characterized by a strong streak of epistemological irrationalism and is dominated by anti-democratic conceptions.

The book is devoid of any scientific methodology. At the very start of the work Baberowski stresses that life is just a succession of moments that lack any causality. "This is a rejection of any form of science," Vandreier said. He then cited a number of quotes from the text that proved the reactionary character of Baberowski's theory of violence.

Baberowski regards human beings as immutable and inherently violent. He restricts his examination of violence to immediate situations and explicitly argues against the fact that beliefs, reasons or living conditions play any role in the emergence of violence.

If one follows Baberowski's logic of unconditional violence, Vandreier explained, then it is only possible to comprehend a slave revolt or resistance against the Nazis as an expression of the violent nature of man rather than of arising from political convictions or as an expression of the social situation of those affected. Conversely, the industrially organized mass murder of the Nazis is reduced to an expression of the eternal violence of man.

"It's obvious that the issue for Baberowski is not to understand violence, but rather justify it," Vandreier

stated. Baberowski's work was very explicit in this regard. He declares that a society based on social equality is inconceivable and that, above all, obedience is necessary for social order. The enforcement of social order is only feasible on the basis of violence or threats of violence. "This is an anti-democratic argument par excellence," Vandreier explained.

Based on this theory, Baberowski justifies the violence of oppressors against the oppressed. He is also an advocate of new wars. In a recent interview he declared that the only way to fight terrorists was on the principle of "an eye for an eye".

Baberowski even links his theory of violence to his attacks on the October Revolution and his trivialization of Nazi crimes. In his book he describes the war of annihilation carried out by the Nazis on the eastern front as a conflict the German army was drawn into against its will, which then got out of control. In this manner the planned mass murder carried out by the Nazis is trivialized and stripped of its significance, Vandreier maintained. Baberowski also provides a basis for xenophobic agitation when he argues in his book that the coexistence of different cultures is not possible.

The fact that such right-wing positions have reemerged and are being defended can only be explained within the context of the rapidly escalating political situation, Vandreier declared. "Along with the reemergence of dictatorship and militarism come the reactionary ideologies of the past used to back them up." The German ruling class has used the war against Syria as an opportunity to promote a massive rearmament of the Bundeswehr. This policy is linked to fundamental attacks on democratic rights.

Vandreier explained that the IYSSE opposes this development with a socialist perspective. "This is a perspective that explains how violence is ultimately rooted in class society, in social inequality and exploitation," he stated. "It is the crisis of capitalism, which brings forth war and oppression. At the same time the capitalist system gives rise to the very contradictions that make it possible to overcome it."

After the report there was an extensive debate about Vandreier's remarks in which the two professors in attendance participated. Most of the audience was shocked by the positions advanced by Baberowski.

Kristin, who is studying history at Humboldt

University and was attending an IYSSE meeting for the first time, spoke out early on in the discussion. "I am shocked that such a man could teach here at the university," she said to the applause by many students. "In part, this book could have been written by a supporter of Hitler. The quotations presented here, especially with regard to the invasion in the East, cannot be dismissed merely as an act of violence, which had gotten out of hand and was comparable to the Russian civil war. The Wehrmacht invaded and slaughtered Jews and Russians."



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