

German Green Party leader confronts Jörg Baberowski with his war propaganda

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Cem Özdemir, the national chairman of the German Green Party, challenged Professor Jörg Baberowski over his call to use methods associated with wars of extermination in the struggle against terrorism on last Thursday's edition of the "Maybrit Illner" talk show.

The programme, with an audience of approximately 3 million, was broadcast under the title, "Break-in, theft, attack: Criminality without borders?" and was aimed at justifying the strengthening of the police. Along with Özdemir and Baberowski, Christian Social Union (CSU) politician Stefan Mayer, sociologist Gina Wollinger, and Sebastian Fiedler of the Association of German Detectives (BDK) were invited as guests. [1]

Baberowski spoke out against investing in education or giving greater value to social work in order to limit violence in areas of high social tension. Instead he declared: "The only way to deal with this is for the state to bare its teeth." At this point Özdemir objected and confronted Baberowski with a statement that he made in the course of the "Schlüterhof Talks" at the German Historical Museum on October 1, 2014.

Özdemir asked whether baring teeth meant using the kinds of methods Baberowski had proposed to fight ISIS terrorists. He cited Baberowski word for word: "And if one is not willing to take hostages, burn villages, hang people and spread fear and terror, as the terrorists do, if one is not prepared to do such things, then one can never win such a conflict."

He was sorry to say, the Green politician added, but anyone who said such things "has got a screw loose."

Baberowski responded with feigned anger, lies and libels.

"We have to speak plainly," he said. "This smeary text in the *taz* [Tageszeitung daily] is from a Stalinist, extremist sect." After Özdemir asked twice, "Is the citation false or correct?" Baberowski asserted that it was "torn completely out of context." "You can't speak to me like that, I will not allow it," he snapped at Özdemir.

He had said that if one was not prepared to engage with the logic of the Taliban and terrorists of taking hostages and burning down villages, "it is better to keep out altogether." This sentence, according to Baberowski, was "maliciously omitted by these Stalinists, who you are citing, in order to defame me." He had stated, Baberowski added, "that we cannot adopt these methods. And therefore we cannot intervene."

The following day, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* defended Baberowski, claiming that the sentence cited by Özdemir was

"never said" by Baberowski. The Green chair was pursuing "the goal of denunciation with this distorting citation." "Özdemir was merely concerned with morally discrediting an opponent, not with the content." [2]

What Baberowski said at the German Historical Museum

Baberowski and the FAZ are lying. The German Historical Museum has made available an audio recording of the Schlüterhof Discussion from October 1, 2014, online, which can still be accessed today. [3] There, from Minute 20:00, Baberowski says exactly what Özdemir quoted.

The *World Socialist Web Site* reported on the event a week later, on October 9, 2014, and cited the passage in full. [4] The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth organisation of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG), referred to this quote repeatedly in its conflict with Baberowski at Humboldt University.

Baberowski's description of the IYSSE as a "Stalinist sect" is a deliberate lie and a defamation. He knows that the IYSSE is an irreconcilable opponent of Stalinism. For three years, he has been combatting the IYSSE at Humboldt as Trotskyists. FAZ editor Jürgen Kaube even published an article at the end of 2014 entitled "Mobbing, Trotskyist style," which denounced the IYSSE because of its criticisms of Baberowski.

But in front of a large audience, Baberowski deems it appropriate to lie and denounce the IYSSE as "Stalinists." As an historian who has concentrated on Stalinism for years, and as a member of the Maoist KBW in his youth who praised Stalin and Pol Pot, he knows that Stalinism is discredited and hated and that tens of thousands of Trotskyists paid with their lives for their opposition to it.

Just as fraudulent is Baberowski's claim that the IYSSE maliciously omitted the half sentence, "it is better to keep out altogether," in order to defame him. In fact, the WSW cited it in its initial article from October 2014, as well as in subsequent publications. Anyway, this half sentence changes nothing about the reactionary character of Baberowski's statement.

The essence of it is that one can only combat terrorists with the resort, in violation of international law, to the methods of a war of

extermination. This is the typical line of argument of the extreme right to legitimize war crimes and prepare public opinion for them: “If one is not ready to torture, eliminate suspects with drones, or—as in Iraq and Libya—destroy entire cities, then it is better to keep out altogether.”

The assertion that violence can be combatted only with more brutal violence runs like a thread through all of Baberowski’s public statements, including those on domestic security, when he calls—as on “Maybrit Illner”—for a strong, authoritarian state.

Baberowski’s claim that he spoke out against military interventions against terrorists at the German Historical Museum is a lie as well.

This is already clear from the passage cited. Baberowski did not say one should keep out of such interventions because they can only be won with the methods of a war of extermination. Instead, he said one should keep out if one *was not ready* to use such inhumane methods. This is obviously something else.

In the further course of the Schlüterhof discussion, Baberowski vehemently advocated such interventions. However, he insisted that they had to be so well prepared that they could be won.

Immediately following the passage cited, Baberowski said it was “important that Germany accepts responsibility, especially in such conflicts which affect it.” But one should consider “(a) what type of war is one prepared for, and (b) whether one can win. And if one cannot win then one should refrain from it.”

Somewhat later, he added, “In the case of an institution such as ISIS, the military can quickly deal with it with decapitation strikes. That’s no problem. The Americans can solve this. One can liquidate the leaders of this band with hit squads. That’s no problem. This is doable.”

But if “state structures have been completely destroyed by a long civil war,” one has “to be aware that this will cost a great deal of money and you have to send soldiers and weapons into a power vacuum,” continued Baberowski. However, the most important thing was, “you need the political will and political strategy and, above all, you have to say that in order for this to work, we will go in. And it has to be worth it. That costs money. We have to send troops in. Countries like Iraq, Syria and Libya are no longer able to solve this problem themselves.”

Baberowski made similar statements on subsequent occasions. On November 25, 2015, in the *Esslinger Zeitung*, he called for combating terrorists with their own methods: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” He said on the terrorist attacks in France, “I thought it was a fatal error that Mrs. Merkel said to the French, ‘We are crying with you.’ Whoever responds in this way will be condemned by the terrorists as a weakling.”

Baberowski’s right-wing agenda

Jörg Baberowski has become a leading spokesman for a new right in Germany. He is a sought-after author and guest in the media or at public meetings, when it comes to beating the drums of war, agitating against refugees or promoting a strong, authoritarian

state.

He originally made a name for himself by downplaying the Nazis’ war of extermination and the justification of militarism. In 2007, he authored a text in which he made the Soviet Union responsible for the war of extermination on the Eastern Front in World War II, stating, “Stalin and his generals imposed a war of a new type on the Wehrmacht from which the civilian population was no longer protected.” And in 2014, he told *Der Spiegel*, “Hitler was no psychopath, and he was not vicious.”

The book “Scholarship or War Propaganda,” [5] which outlines the conflict at Berlin’s Humboldt University, documents this in detail.

Last year, Baberowski then emerged as an agitator against refugees. In numerous articles and public appearances he spoke out in favour of a drastic restriction of the right to asylum. [6] He publicly accused Chancellor Merkel of violating the constitution because she permitted refugees stranded in Eastern Europe to travel to Germany. He adopted a line of argument associated with right-wing extremist circles.

More recently, Baberowski has come forward as an advocate for a strong, authoritarian state. This is why he was invited onto the “Maybrit Illner” talk show. There, he sought to outdo CSU politician Mayer and the detective Fiedler on matters of “law and order.”

As with previous appearances, [7] Baberowski rejected any kind of social prevention and called instead for the state to take ruthless and authoritarian measures. As he stated, “These people, who often come from and reside within authoritarian milieus, respond only when, so to speak, the state makes clear its enforcement powers and its assertiveness, otherwise it appears ridiculous. And a state which makes itself appear ridiculous can have no impact.”

References:

1. The programme can be accessed on the ZDF Mediathek. The conflict over the citation begins at 47:00.
2. “When society is like ‘Mad Max’,” by Frank Lübberding, faz.net, May 30, 2016.
3. German Historical Museum, “Germany as an interventionist power?” Schlüterhof discussion from October 1, 2014. The audio recording is here.
4. Johannes Stern, “War propaganda in the German Historical Museum,” WSWs, October 9, 2014.
5. Peter Schwarz (Ed.), “Scholarship or war propaganda”, Mehring Verlag, 2015.
6. See: “German academic Jörg Baberowski stirs up hatred against refugees,” WSWs, October 3, 2015.
7. See: “Right-wing German academic Jörg Baberowski demands more repression against refugees”, WSWs, May 31, 2016.



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