

Bremen University student body protests against Professor Jörg Baberowski

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The Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), which is linked to the Christian Democratic Union, in collaboration with the Association of Christian Democratic Students (RCDS), has invited Professor Jörg Baberowski to speak at Bremen University this Thursday. The right-wing historian is to speak on the topic “Understanding Violence.”

There is strong opposition to the event amongst students at the university. The general student committee (Asta), the highest body of the student government system, called on its web site last Thursday for the university administration to deny use of a university facility to the professor.

“Baberowski, a controversial teacher at Humboldt University in Berlin, has in the recent period repeatedly justified violent clashes against refugees and attacks on their accommodations, employs a nationalist vocabulary, and advances far-right positions in the political debate on issues of migration policy,” the Asta statement declares. “We protest against giving a man who confronts people with utter hatred the opportunity to appear on a campus that purports to promote openness and is financed by all of us.”

The student representatives illustrate the professor’s right-wing agitation by citing several passages and sources and come to the conclusion that Baberowski is no better than the far-right AfD (Alternative for Germany). “His newspaper interviews,” they state, “read like a simplistic succession of well-known right-wing populist mantras, such as the incitement of the socially disadvantaged against each other, the premise that democratic popular opinion is tantamount to dictatorship, and praise for neighbouring states with more restrictive asylum and immigration laws.”

The statement goes on to note that Baberowski legitimises and downplays the Pegida slogan “We are

the people” and related attacks on refugee housing centres. “He dreams of Germany as a homogeneous national body, whose ‘social glue,’ in his eyes, faces an existential threat from the ‘other,’ the ‘illegal immigrant,’” the Asta statement continues.

The Asta writes that Baberowski’s research on violence, about which he will speak on Thursday, can best be described as dubious. “It abandons any attempt to identify the origins of violence, negates the possibility of preventing violence, and declares an even more violent intervention by the state as the sovereign power capable of combating violence.”

The statement closes with the words: “We are outraged that the downplaying of right-wing violence is given any space at all and have called on the rectorate to withdraw the granting of a room. Otherwise, it will fall to us to ensure that extreme right-wing ideologues cannot propagate their teachings at this university. Let us protest peacefully, colourfully and loudly against agitation and inhumanity.”

The university’s press office told the *World Socialist Web Site* on Monday that while the rectorate welcomed the statement by the Asta, it saw no reason to ban the meeting, since it was assumed that neither the KAS nor the RCDS were attacking the basic tenets of freedom and democracy.

“However, we expect the event organisers to be open to argumentative debate and that the Asta can confront the speaker with its substantial criticisms,” stated press office head Eberhard Scholz. “Argumentative discourse is the most important thing for us.”

Baberowski evidently was not prepared to accept these conditions. The RCDS announced on its web site that the event had been moved from the university campus to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation building at Domshof 22. The event organisers can play by their

own rules there and exclude critical students.

Such a move comes as no surprise, given that the Berlin professor is well known for throwing critics out of his meetings and suppressing unwanted positions. When members of the university group of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Humboldt University criticised Baberowski's right-wing positions in leaflets and at meetings, he described the students as "crackpots" and demanded that they be banned from the university and face criminal charges.

It is beyond question that the Asta in Bremen cited and interpreted Baberowski correctly. Almost three years ago, the IYSSE drew attention to his right-wing extremist positions.

In February 2014, the professor solidarised himself with Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte in the news magazine *Der Spiegel*, declaring, "Hitler was no psychopath, he was not vicious." The IYSSE also called attention to the fact that Baberowski had described the Nazi war of annihilation in the East as a response to a "violent space" created by the Soviet Union.

In this way, the professor was attempting "to rewrite history and relativise the crimes of German imperialism so as to prepare for new wars," the IYSSE stated. "His falsification of history is directly connected to calls for more military interventions."

Since last summer, as the Bremen Asta makes clear, Baberowski has systematically agitated against refugees and downplayed violence against them. Almost weekly in interviews and talk shows, he calls for a stronger state and new wars.

The close ties between the professor and right-wing circles was demonstrated by the speed with which representatives of the far right sprang to his defence after the students in Bremen published their criticisms. Nicolaus Fest, a member of the Islamophobic AfD party, accused the students of spreading untruths about Baberowski, without providing any evidence. The national conservative web site Tichys Einblick spoke of "thought police from Antifa and co."

By contrast, opposition to the promotion of xenophobia and the ideological preparations for war from right-wing professors is mounting among students. Last year, the student parliaments at Humboldt University and the Free University of Berlin passed resolutions by overwhelming majorities

supporting criticisms of Baberowski and calling upon students to "express themselves politically, challenge authority and combat tendencies to downplay Germany's inhuman history in teaching content at a university."

Earlier this year, students at Leipzig University protested against the xenophobic, right-wing professor Thomas Rauscher. There have also been protests in Dresden and Rostock against right-wing and militarist positions put forward by professors.

The protests demonstrate that students are not prepared to tolerate the transformation of the universities into right-wing and militarist think tanks.



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