Hamburg student committee protests appearance by Professor Jörg Baberowski

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Protests are growing at German universities against the right-wing historian Jörg Baberowski. Earlier this month, only weeks after students at Bremen University protested against an appearance at that institution by Baberowski, students at Hamburg University demonstrated in opposition to an event for Baberowski organised by the Evangelical Academy of the Nordkirche and the Centre for Political Education at the State and University Library of Hamburg.

Prior to the event, the General Student Committee (ASTA) at the University of Hamburg, the highest body of the student government, called the protest. The ASTA issued a leaflet titled "Right-wing populist researcher on Eastern Europe Professor Baberowski in the library? No university for racism! No platform for right-wing radicals!"

The statement was distributed by some 30 students to the approximately 60 attendees. It said: "Baberowski was not disinvited, although the ASTA urged the University of Hamburg to do so. Therefore, we want to make clear that there is no place for racism at the university!"

It went on to state that the university's role is "as it states in its general principles, to carry out 'scholarship in the service of humanity.' That means exposing all ideologies of inequality and contributing to a world in which war, inequality and exclusion belong to the past."

Like the ASTA in Bremen, the Hamburg student body declared, "Baberowski, a controversial teacher at Humboldt University in Berlin, has in the recent period repeatedly justified violent clashes with refugees and attacks on their accommodations. He employs a nationalist vocabulary and advances right-wing populist positions in the political debate on immigration issues. We are protesting against a man who confronts people with pure hatred being allowed to appear on a campus that supposedly seeks to send a message of openness."

The statement documents Baberowski's right-wing agitation, citing numerous sources, and concludes: "Baberowski is no better than the [ultra-right, anti-immigrant] AfD [Alternative for Germany]. His newspaper interviews read like those of many well known right-wing populist figures who seek to incite socially disadvantaged groups against each other...denounce the dictatorship of public opinion'... and praise neighbouring states that have more restrictive asylum and immigration laws." In addition, the statement continues, he has downplayed and legitimised "attacks on refugee accommodation centres...fully in the spirit of the [anti-immigrant] Pegida slogan, 'We are the people.'"

The Hamburg ASTA also criticised Baberowski's "research on violence," which "at best [can] be described as dubious." Its statement notes that Baberowski calls for a "stronger intervention by the state" as the most effect way to combat violence.

It concludes with the words: "We are outraged that the downplaying of right-wing violence is given any space at all. We are responsible for preventing right-wing ideologues from propagating their teachings at this university." It rejects attempts to give a platform to right-wing populists under cover of "plurality of opinions" or "tolerance."

Representatives of the Hamburg ASTA told the *World Socialist Web Site* that Baberowski used his lecture, titled "Between fear and fascination: The Soviet Union in the modern century," to promulgate his right-wing positions. Oliver Vornfeld from the Department of Public Affairs said Baberowski's lecture boiled down to "a repetition of the theses of Ernst Nolte in the Historikerstreit."

Baberowski, according to Vornfeld, "subtly indicated that National Socialism [Nazism] in Germany was a reaction to Bolshevism and that its organisational form was taken from the Bolsheviks."

(Ernst Nolte was a right-wing German historian who triggered what became known as the Historians' Dispute (Historikerstreit) when in 1986 he published a paper justifying Nazism as a logical response to Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution. Professor Baberowski defended Nolte in a 2014 article in *Der Spiegel*, writing: "Nolte was done an injustice. Historically speaking, he was right." In the same article, Baberowski cast Adolf Hitler in a favourable light, declaring, "Hitler was no psychopath, and he wasn't vicious. He didn't want people to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table.")

Vornfeld reported that he raised these issues in the discussion period that followed Baberowski's lecture. He said he questioned the academic validity of Baberowski's lecture and noted that the now-deceased Nazi apologist Nolte "had been

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invited to speak in recent decades only by pseudo-academics and right-wing radicals." Baberowski did not answer him substantively, "but accused me of being stupid and said he would not deal with slanders."

When another person in the audience criticised Baberowski's reference to Nolte, according to Vornfeld, Baberowski almost "lost it" and "began shouting and intimidating him."

Already in 2012, academics in the *Osteuropa* magazine pointed out that Baberowski was implicitly repeating Nolte's positions in his writings on Stalinism, and downplaying the crimes of National Socialism.

Benno Ennker, who teaches in Tübingen and St. Gallen, criticised Baberowski's book *Scorched Earth* for "an implicit exoneration of the Wehrmacht." He wrote in response to Baberowski's assertion that the National Socialists could "no longer bring the war of annihilation [against the Soviet Union] under control," that "Such an exculpation—unsupported by evidence—of the ideologically planned extermination policy in the East by 'situation and circumstances' had up to now only been associated with the scandalous Polish historian Bogdan Musial." [1]

Christoph Dieckmann from the Fritz Bauer Institute for the History and Impact of the Holocaust accused Baberowski of ignoring "the research that has demonstrated the broad consensus within the German leadership and the heads of the Wehrmacht prior to the attack on the Soviet Union to subject millions of Soviet citizens to death by starvation within a few months." [2]

A detailed discussion of Baberowski's apologetics for National Socialism is provided in the article "Jörg Baberowski's Falsification of History" by Christoph Vandreier in the book *Scholarship or War Propaganda?* (3)

Baberowski's behaviour in Hamburg is typical for him. He claims the right to spread his right-wing historical and political positions, agitate for war and against refugees, and even sharply criticise the chancellor from the right. But as soon as someone dares challenge him, the Humboldt University professor portrays himself as the victim of a slander campaign and becomes incontinent with rage. Baberowski is notorious for throwing critics out of his meetings.

When the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) group at Humboldt University criticised Baberowski's positions at public meetings and in leaflets, Baberowski described his student critics as "crazies" and urged that they be banned from the university and criminally charged.

In February 2014, Baberowski moved a public colloquium at Humbold University to a secret room and employed a security firm to suppress criticism of a Trotsky biography by the discredited British historian Robert Service. He not only prevented David North, the most well known critic of Service, from attending the meeting, he also blocked specialists in the field such as Mario Kessler and students from Humboldt University whom he suspected would ask challenging questions.

Baberowski was apparently unwilling to face criticism from students in Bremen. After protests mounted among students over his use of university facilities, he moved the meeting to the private rooms of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), which had invited him to Bremen. The lecture was guarded by two dozen police and a team of security officers so as to suppress any dissenting voices.

While right-wing elements in the state apparatus and media continue to defend Baberowski as he moves ever further to the right, students are no longer prepared to accept the transformation of their universities into centres of war propaganda and militarism.

An executive member of the Hamburg ASTA, Philipp Droll, reported to the *World Socialist Web Site*: "We have been through a series of conflicts. For example, once a year a job fair is held at the student centre. The Bundeswehr (German army) wanted to have a stall there, and as a student body we had a long campaign to explain that this was not acceptable. Ultimately, the stall was not set up. When adverts for the Bundeswehr started appearing in the canteens last week, we protested to the student centre and they were stopped."

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References

[1] Ennker, Benno (2012): "Ohne Ideologie, ohne Staat, ohne Alternative?—Fragen an Jörg Baberowski," in *Osteuropa*, Volume 62, Issue 4, April 2012, p. 112.

[2] Dieckmann, Christoph (2012): "Die Suche geht weiter—Stalin, der Stalinismus und das Rätsel der Gewalt," in: *Osteuropa*, Volume 62, Issue 4, April 2012, p. 131.

[3] Vandreier, Christoph (2015): "Jörg Baberowskis Geschichtsfälschung," in Wissenschaft oder Kriegspropaganda? Die Wiederkehr des deutschen Militarismus und die Auseinandersetzung an der Berliner Humboldt Universität, p. 95-132.

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