

# Jörg Baberowski sues the student body of the University of Bremen

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On Wednesday, January 25, the General Student Committee (Asta) of the University of Bremen in Germany, which represents the student body at the university, announced that Jörg Baberowski had taken legal action against the university's students. The right-wing professor of Eastern European history at Berlin's Humboldt University is attempting in this way to muzzle critics of his reactionary positions.

"The district court (Landgericht) of Cologne has issued an injunction against the student body of the University of Bremen," the website of the student government states. "Accordingly, for the time being, we may not make certain critical statements regarding the complainant Jörg Baberowski. The Asta has filed an appeal against this decision; the case is still under review in the lower courts."

In October 2016, the Asta published a leaflet in which they quoted and politically evaluated statements made by Baberowski regarding refugee policy and the fight against terrorism. Baberowski is now trying to prohibit both in court. Claiming he had been falsely cited and slandered, he wants to prevent the students from quoting him further and expressing their opinions about these quotes.

The Asta produced the leaflet on the occasion of a meeting, with Baberowski as the speaker, organized by the conservative Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) in cooperation with the Association of Christian Democratic Students (RCDS) at the University of Bremen. The students called for a peaceful protest. In response, the university administration declared that it expected the organizers to "be open to a critical debate and that the Asta would be able to confront the speaker with its substantial criticism."

Baberowski was apparently not willing to accept these terms. The event was moved to the premises of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and two dozen police officers were deployed to shield it from critical students. Baberowski hired the Berlin law firm Schertz Bergmann to force the students to remove their leaflet and a subsequent press statement from their website.

At the same time, various blogs and websites from the right and extreme right took up the issue and accused the Bremen students of "intellectual terrorism" ("Gesinnungsterror") and "intellectual tutelage" (geistige Bevormundung). "We consequently received dozens of letters from right-wing extremists who insulted and in some cases threatened us," said Irina from the Asta. Finally, the letter from the law firm arrived.

Baberowski has taken the suit against the Bremen student body as the starting point for proceeding as well against other critics. Christoph Vandreier, the chairman of the IYSSE in Germany and a prominent critic of Baberowski, has already received a cease-and-desist letter because he cited the Asta at the University of Bremen in an article.

Even though the leaflet was distributed at the University of Bremen and Baberowski lives and works in Berlin, Baberowski filed for the injunction against the Asta before the district court of Cologne, which, according to the news magazine *Der Spiegel*, "has come to be considered by journalists as the harshest in the country."

It is highly doubtful that a different court would have issued the injunction since the grounds on which Baberowski is basing his motion to the court, which the WSWS possesses, can only be described as outrageous. Baberowski *de facto* wants to prohibit the students from quoting him and expressing their opinion regarding these quotes. For example, Baberowski demands that the following quote from a debate at the German Historical Museum (DHM) entitled "Germany as an interventionist power" be reproduced only in its entirety:

"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 and it is better to keep out altogether. So on the one hand: Yes, of course, Germany should assume such a role and it is important that Germany accept responsibility, especially in such conflicts that affect it. But one should consider (a) what type of war is one prepared for, and (b) whether one can win. And if you cannot win then you should stay out of it. That is my opinion on the matter."

The students in Bremen are to be prohibited, *inter alia*, from expressing the opinion that these are "theses of horrifying brutality." Already on the talk show "Maybrit Illner" last May, Baberowski indirectly accused Green Party Chairman Cem Özdemir of slander after the latter had confronted him with his own statement. In setting forth the legal basis for applying for an injunction, his lawyer now asserts that in the quote in question, Baberowski had recommended "to not get drawn into a military confrontation with such inhuman terrorists, precisely because one cannot and should not repay like with like."

That this interpretation is false emerges from the quoted sentence itself. Baberowski did not say that one should stay out of such interventions because they could be won only with the methods of a war of annihilation. Rather, he said that one should stay out of them if one is *not prepared* to use such inhumane methods. This is patently different from the interpretation presented by Baberowski's lawyer.

It emerges from the aforementioned quote that Baberowski does advocate wars against terrorists, namely in those cases when they can be won. He left no doubt about this at the German Historical Museum. Among other things, he said: "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 is all no problem. It is doable."

If, on the other hand, "state structures have been completely destroyed by a long civil war," then one must "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. Most importantly, "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 has since made similar statements. Thus, on November 25,

2015, in the *Esslinger Zeitung*, he demanded that the same methods terrorists use be used against them, declaring, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Regarding the terrorist attacks in France, he said: “I felt it was a disastrous error that Ms. Merkel said to the French: ‘We are crying with you.’ Whoever responds in this way will be despised by the terrorists as a weakling.”

Then, in January last year, in an interview with the magazine *Cicero*, he was explicitly asked what he thought of the sentence: “Terror cannot be fought with war.” Baberowski replied, “The sentence is wrong. If terrorists like the present jihadists from the ‘Islamic State’ have declared war, then the war is in the world. I cannot eliminate it by denying its existence. You confront terror only with violent means.”

Such statements by Baberowski are just as unambiguous as the quote from his appearance at the German Historical Museum. The attempt to ban students from quoting and criticizing him therefore constitutes a fundamental attack on freedom of expression. While beating the drum for war, Baberowski wants to silence his critics by proceeding against them in court.

### A notorious right-wing ideologue

Although Baberowski likes to present himself as an honorable professor, in reality, he is a right-wing ideologue. Few academics make as many and as frequent public statements on political issues. He regularly appears on talk shows, gives interviews, and writes articles in which he advances positions that are commonplace in right-wing and ultra-right circles. He is now a regular columnist in the *Basler Zeitung*, which is influenced by the Swiss right-winger Christoph Blocher.

In numerous articles he has attacked the refugee policy of the German chancellor and accused her of breaking the law. He has claimed that refugees are for the most part “a burden, not an asset” (*Basler Zeitung*, 07/01/2016) and said: “The integration of several million people in only a very short time disrupts the historical tradition (Überlieferungszusammenhang) in which we stand and which provides stability and consistency for a society.” (*Basler Zeitung*, 14/9/2015)

Like other representatives of the extreme right, Baberowski gets worked up about the “dictatorship of political correctness” and attacks “moral guardians.” In the *Basler Zeitung* of November 25, 2016, under the headline “Against the culture of political correctness,” he defended the election victory of Donald Trump with the following words: “I wanted my vote to count, this is how an American citizen justified his decision to vote Trump. Is this not something we all want? Then we must grant it to everyone.”

In his academic work, Baberowski has long advocated right-wing positions. Already in his student days he sided with the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte in the “Historikerstreit” (historians’ dispute), in which Nolte described the Holocaust as an understandable reaction to the violence of Stalinism. In February 2014, the leading German journal *Der Spiegel* presented Baberowski as the chief witness for the rehabilitation of Nolte and quoted him as follows: “Hitler was no psychopath, and he was not vicious. He didn’t want people to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table.” (*Der Spiegel*, 7/2/2014)

In his own writings, Baberowski goes well beyond the Nolte of the Historikerstreit. One can find formulations denying that the Nazis carried out a planned war of extermination in the East and presenting the murder of millions of people as a reaction to the resistance of the Red Army. “Hitler’s soldiers did not wage a war of Weltanschauung [ideology]. They were trapped in a war that had its own inescapable dynamic,” he declared in his book *Scorched Earth*, thus denying both the fact that these mass

murders had been planned and their anti-Semitic dimension. Five years earlier, he had written: “Stalin and his generals imposed a war of a new type on the Wehrmacht from which the civilian population was no longer protected.”

While calling Germany the “land of moral guardians and subjects,” which “banishes” dissidents “into the dark Germany” (*Basler Zeitung*, 07/01/2016), Baberowski aggressively proceeds against critics of his own right-wing positions. Already back in early 2014, he locked out critical professors and students from an event with Robert Service, the discredited biographer of Leon Trotsky. When student members of the IYSSE distributed leaflets to students at Humboldt University addressing his right-wing positions, he went to see the university authorities to have the IYSSE banned from using rooms at the university. When the IYSSE nevertheless held large meetings, he went to the press demanding that the IYSSE be thrown out of the university. Now he is going so far as to sue against unwelcome criticism.

Right-wing ideologues are well known to use such methods. When criticized, they pose as victims of slander and a dictatorship of opinion, only to pursue their critics all the more ruthlessly in order to silence them.

In the Historikerstreit of the 1980s, Nolte’s main line of defense was to imply that his critics were slandering him. The accusations ranged from “sloppy research and forged quotes” (Michael Stürmer) to “distorting citations” (Klaus Hildebrand). Nolte himself insisted that he had not been quoted correctly.

When Deborah Lipstadt cited the Holocaust denier David Irving in her book *Denying the Holocaust* and pointed to his defense of Hitler, the latter first tried to stop the sale of the book and then sued for libel. He lost the case. Now, Baberowski is using very similar methods to intimidate critical students.

### Defend the student body of Bremen

The fact that Baberowski dares to act in such an aggressive manner and sue the student body of the University of Bremen is bound up with fundamental changes in society. The Trump presidency has shifted the axis of the political establishment to the right. In Germany too, xenophobia, nationalism and militarism are again becoming part of official politics.

Defending the Bremen student body is therefore of the utmost importance. What is at stake is nothing less than defense of the right to expose and criticize reactionary, nationalist and militarist positions. If a proven right-wing ideologue like Baberowski should succeed with his attempts at censorship, it would signify the criminalization of any resistance to the shift to the right.

We therefore call on school pupils, students, Astas, teachers and especially workers to support the Bremen student body. Send letters of solidarity to the Asta Bremen University and send a copy to [iysse@gleichheit.de](mailto:iysse@gleichheit.de) !



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**