

Right-wing German professor Jörg Baberowski threatens students who criticize him

Our correspondents
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Jörg Baberowski, professor of history at Berlin's Humboldt University, is responding to mounting criticism of his right-wing political positions with scurrilous accusations against his critics and by inciting students reliant on him against them.

On February 8, Sven Wurm, the spokesman for the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at the college, and a fellow student were distributing leaflets in the Humboldt University main building. The leaflets advertised a meeting to express solidarity with the General Student Committee (Asta) at Bremen University, which is the target of a lawsuit by Baberowski.

Wurm was physically confronted by Baberowski, who insulted Wurm, threatened to call the police and began photographing him without his permission. Baberowski continued his denunciations of the IYSSE in his lecture and called on those students present to take action against the IYSSE.

Among other things, Baberowski accused Wurm, who studies in his department, of being a "red-coated fascist" and a "disgusting informer." He denounced the youth organisation of the International Committee of the Fourth International as a "filthy Stalinist sect." He accused university management of being "cowardly" and permitting "these criminals to do and allow what they want," instead of "simply denying [them] access to the lecture hall or issuing a ban on them at the institution." Baberowski incited the students to disrupt the IYSSE meeting. "Everybody can do something," declared Baberowski, who proceeded to read out the location and time of the next IYSSE meeting.

Baberowski's lawsuit against the Bremen Asta seeks a provisional order to prevent the committee not only

from criticising, but from also quoting certain of his statements. On Wednesday, the Cologne State Court will rule in the first hearing on the case. If Baberowski is successful, it will create a precedent for threatening critics of right-wing political positions with high monetary fines.

The Bremen Asta has won widespread support. On February 2, approximately 100 students came to a solidarity meeting in Bremen, which was addressed by IYSSE members from Berlin. In Berlin, several student representative bodies, including at the Free University and Humboldt University, have adopted statements of solidarity. Representatives of the Bremen Asta will be present at the IYSSE solidarity meeting at Humboldt University, which takes place tonight.

With his aggressive attacks on the IYSSE, which secured four seats in the student parliament in elections earlier this year, Baberowski is seeking to suppress criticism of his right-wing positions with intimidation. He is using his authority as a professor to pressure students who are dependent on him in many ways—from the evaluation of their work to their academic career—to support his right-wing political positions. If they criticise him or solidarise with the IYSSE, which he describes as "criminal," they can expect to fall out of his favour.

However, the issue is not a personal campaign by the IYSSE against Baberowski, as he has sought to present it. Rather, the IYSSE is fighting the efforts of the extreme right to promote its reactionary agenda, suppress free speech and intimidate students.

Baberowski is not a victimized professor who has been unjustly attacked. He is a right-wing demagogue who uses his position at Humboldt University and a

network of media commentators to promote his political profile. Hardly a week goes by in which he does not advocate far-right positions in newspaper articles, interviews, talk shows and public appearances.

He accused conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel of violating the constitution because she let refugees into the country, described the Federal Republic as a “republic of virtues” where one could not state one’s opinion, and called for a police state.

Baberowski’s targeting of the IYSSE with a mixture of distortions, threats and the mobilisation of right-wing elements is typical of the extreme right. He is employing the same recipe that Donald Trump used to become president of the United States, and that Trump’s chief political adviser, the fascist Stephen Bannon, intends to use to bring the whole country into line.

It is no coincidence that Breitbart News, the far-right web site led by Bannon for some time, has praised the “renowned professor” for his anti-refugee statements. The neo-Nazi web site *Daily Stormer* has also applauded Baberowski. The same applies to the extreme-right German paper *Junge Freiheit* and the fascist NPD in Germany.

On the other hand, Baberowski defended Trump’s electoral victory in an article entitled “Against the culture of the politically correct,” writing, “‘I wanted my voice to count,’ said an American citizen to justify his vote for Trump. Is that not what we all want? Then we must allow everyone to do so.”

Baberowski also defended the extreme right-wing Swiss politician Christoph Blocher in the *Basler Zeitung* as a “successful, conservative businessman” who is “certainly not a right-wing radical.” Blocher owns a share of the *Basler Zeitung*, which opens its pages for a regular column from Baberowski.

Baberowski also advances an explicitly right-wing agenda in his academic work. In February 2014, he spoke out in defence of Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte and declared, “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.” In his works, Baberowski has minimised the role of anti-Semitism in the Holocaust and has claimed that the Soviet generals imposed a war on the Wehrmacht “which no longer excluded the civilian population.”

This relativisation and downplaying of Nazi crimes

has a political logic. To prepare new wars and to make xenophobia and chauvinism methods of politics once again, as is currently happening in the US, history must be re-written in Germany, the crimes of German imperialism must be justified and whitewashed.



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