

Stop the shift to the right at Humboldt University!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality
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A political conflict is evolving at Berlin's Humboldt University, the significance of which reaches far beyond the university campus. Professor Jörg Baberowski, who regularly advances xenophobic, authoritarian and militarist positions in public, is going to court and mobilising right-wing students to suppress criticism of his far-right positions.

Should Baberowski succeed, it would represent a blow against freedom of opinion and a further step in the transformation of the Humboldt University into a centre of right-wing, militarist ideology. While Baberowski is using his position as head of the Department of Eastern European History to propagate far-right positions at the university and beyond, students who challenge his views would risk punishment and significant professional disadvantages.

The issue is not merely a dispute at Humboldt University, but involves fundamental political questions. Baberowski's attacks on refugees and calls for a strong state are now official German policy. Refugees are being discriminated against and deported, the police and intelligence agencies strengthened, and the defence budget doubled. There are even public discussions about the reintroduction of military service and the need for Germany to acquire its own nuclear weapons.

Broad sections of the population oppose these developments. The realisation of such a programme would require, as in the 1930s, a dictatorship. This is why Baberowski speaks out in favour of a strong state, welcomes the election of Donald Trump, defends the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and praises the Nazi jurist and theoretician of the state of emergency, Carl Schmitt.

How Baberowski deals with critics

Last year, Baberowski secured a preliminary injunction against the Student Union (Asta) in Bremen, banning it from citing and criticizing some of his right-wing statements.

Last October the Asta in Bremen called for a peaceful protest against the appearance of the right-wing professor at the university, where he was due to speak at the invitation of the Association of Christian Democratic Students (RCDS) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. The Asta cited comments by Baberowski on the refugee crisis and the "war on terror," which they now cannot criticise or cite without risking a fine of up to €250,000. The Asta challenged this order, and the State Court in Cologne is due to rule on the case on March 15.

The action taken by the HU professor against the student representative body of another university has provoked outrage. The student parliament at Berlin's Free University and the Assembly of Student Representative Councils (FRIV) at Humboldt University, along with other student bodies, registered protests. In Bremen, around 100 students took part in a solidarity meeting at which representatives of the IYSSE reported on the

conflict with Baberowski in Berlin. The IYSSE organised a well-attended solidarity meeting addressed by representatives of the Bremen Asta at Humboldt University.

Baberowski responded to this wave of solidarity with heinous personal insults and threats directed against IYSSE members campaigning for solidarity with the Bremen students. At one of his lectures, he denounced the IYSSE, the Trotskyist youth organisation with four elected representatives on the student parliament, as a "Stalinist sect." He accused the university management for being "cowards" because it allowed these "criminals" to act and do as they pleased. He called on his students, whose marks and career prospects depend on him, to act against the IYSSE.

An open letter is now circulating among right-wing students and ancillary staff at the institute of history addressed to the HU president, accusing the IYSSE of defaming and slandering Baberowski. It calls upon the university management to "prohibit" the IYSSE's criticism. Management has so far remained silent about these incidents, even though the IYSSE has filed a complaint against Baberowski's insults and threatening behaviour.

It is significant that neither Baberowski nor the students he has mobilised have uttered a word about the content of his right-wing positions. They are doing everything to silence criticism of Baberowski, but they are incapable of answering a single argument.

Yet there is no other professor who appears so frequently in the media or at public meetings and speaks so openly in favour of xenophobic, authoritarian and militarist positions. He does not even attempt to formally separate his role as a right-wing agitator from his teaching activities at the university. On his university web site, where academic publications are usually listed, he registers no less than 101 radio interviews, 39 television contributions, 32 newspaper articles and 148 essays, the vast majority of which deal with political topics.

Baberowski's right-wing agitation

The list also includes the demagogic columns authored every month by Baberowski for the *Basler Zeitung*, owned by Swiss right-wing populist Christoph Blocher. The views promoted by Baberowski correspond with those advanced by Donald Trump's chief strategist Stephen Bannon. It is no accident that the Breitbart News web site, which Bannon previously headed, repeatedly praised the "renowned professor" Baberowski for his agitation against refugees.

Like Trump and Bannon, Baberowski praises Brexit—"a democratic exclamation mark"—as a decision of the citizens of Britain "against the policy of open borders ... which Chancellor Merkel wants to impose on Europe."

Tirades against Merkel's refugee policy alternate with calls for ruthless state violence against Islamic terrorism. "Indifference is just another word for cowardice," he writes. "Whoever understands only the language of violence should feel it themselves." Referring to politicians who called for prudence in the wake of the Berlin terrorist attack, Baberowski rails, "On the political stage, the song of self-disempowerment is being sung."

He celebrates Trump's election victory in the *Basler Zeitung* as a blow "against the culture of political correctness." He defends the AfD against the "groundless accusation" that there were fascists among its parliamentary deputies.

Another recurring issue that recalls Trump and Bannon is Baberowski's attacks on the media and established political parties. The professor, who enjoys access to a wide range of media channels and who ruthlessly attacks his critics, creates the impression that he lives in a dictatorship where opinions are suppressed. Commenting on criticism of Volkish-nationalist ideas and xenophobia, he wrote: "With a moral pistol, the safety catch off, the dictatorship of the politically correct compels citizens to say only what it wants to hear."

At the height of the refugee crisis in October 2015, Baberowski raged in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* against the "virtue-mania" of the "authorities," who excluded those opposed to refugees from the debate on immigration. "In the world of the moral righteous, into which Germany has been transformed by the mainstream media, prudence and reason have been outlawed. Whoever refers to healthy common sense risks exclusion and contempt. Whoever violates the limits of the republic of virtues is to be banished to darkest Germany."

In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Baberowski simultaneously played off socially disadvantaged sections of the population against refugees, in the style of the AfD or France's National Front. "Why should an immigrant receive for free what those who live here have worked hard for decades to secure?" he asked. "Secretaries, construction workers, mothers who have little money available in their old age, hairdressers unable to afford a home because their wages are insufficient, do not understand why the social welfare net is there for those who have made no contribution to its financing."

He ultimately drew on the arguments of cultural racism to justify his agitation against refugees. "The integration of several million people in a short time interrupts the continuity of our traditions, on which we base ourselves and which sustain a society and provide it with consistency," he wrote.

There can be no doubt about the extreme right-wing character of Baberowski's views. Even in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Jannis Panagotidis, Patrice Poutrous and Frank Wolff have criticised Baberowski for abandoning in his polemics "knowledge derived from historical migration research in favour of intervening in the debate as a 'concerned citizen' with pre-scientific professions of faith."

In the *taz* newspaper, Daniel Bax accused "prominent publicists" of acting as "mouthpieces for right-wing and far-right circles," and referred to Baberowski as an example. "Baberowski was invited to a CSU (Christian Social Union) meeting in Erding in early October," he wrote. "But his theses are also shared by the NPD (a neofascist party)."

The fact that Baberowski advances far-right positions is recognized not only by his critics, but by the extreme right as well. Along with Breitbart News, the neo-Nazi website *Daily Stormer* praised Baberowski for his agitation against refugees. In Germany, he is lauded for the same reason by the far-right newspaper *Junge Freiheit* and the fascist NPD.

Baberowski's revision of history

There is a good reason why Baberowski does not separate his role as a right-wing agitator from his work as a historian. In his academic field, he also advocates far-right theses based on historical revisionism.

His work on Stalinist violence is motivated by his support for the work of Ernst Nolte, who downplayed the Nazis as an ultimately understandable reaction to Bolshevism. Although Stalin's reign of terror in 1937 and 1938 was aimed above all against the leadership of the October Revolution, Baberowski persistently refused to acknowledge any break between the October Revolution and Stalinism. And although the mere accusation of Trotskyism amounted to a death sentence, he denies the fact that the Trotskyist Left Opposition waged an embittered struggle against Stalinism on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective.

In early 2014, Baberowski told *Der Spiegel* that he had already defended Nolte at the time of the *Historikerstreit* (Historians' Dispute) when Baberowski was a student. "Nolte was done an injustice, historically speaking, he was right," he added. As with Nolte, Baberowski's writings are characterised by the downplaying of the crimes of the Nazis. He told *Der Spiegel* in the same interview, "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 Baberowski's books, there are many passages suggesting that the Nazis' war in the east was not planned as a war of annihilation, but forced on the Wehrmacht by Stalin. This is also the case in his latest book, *Räume der Gewalt* (Spaces of Violence), which, in addition, virtually denies the Nazis' anti-Semitic motives.

The word anti-Semitism does not appear once in the entire book, and the word "anti-Semites" only three times, and then only in a negative sense, as Alan Posener noted in *Die Welt*. He cited Baberowski's assertion regarding the paramilitary death squads of the SS, "Not even in the *Einsatzgruppen* were particularly motivated anti-Semites to be found," before adding ironically, "They just murdered Jews." Posener summed up his criticism by stating, "There was a time when such a dismissal of the role of anti-Semitism in the Holocaust would have been a scandal in Germany. The intellectual level of the country has degenerated to such an extent that Baberowski is being feted."

Baberowski's book on violence lacks even the most basic scientific method and serves to justify a right-wing policy of law-and-order. His theory of violence presents human beings as unalterable and violent, explains violence purely on the basis of the immediate situation and denies it has any relevant social or ideological causes.

According to his thesis, order can only be established by means of the force of the state and not through social progress. As he said at a panel discussion in Berlin, "All the money spent on social programmes to civilise people could just as well be tossed in the (river) Spree." Instead, he called for a better equipping of the state to reinforce its monopoly on the use of force. These views also overlap with those of Bannon, who wants to "deconstruct" the welfare state and strengthen the police instead.

The ruling elite's shift to the right

The aggressiveness with which Baberowski puts forward his right-wing positions and attacks his critics can only be understood in the context of the global shift to the right by the ruling elites in every country. They are responding to the global crisis of capitalism, which has further deepened since the 2008 economic crisis, as they did in the last century: with war and dictatorship.

The coming to office of Donald Trump, the most right-wing president in American history, has increased the danger that humanity will be wiped out in a nuclear war. Trump and his cabinet, made up of billionaires,

generals and right-wing ideologues, have declared war on the American working class and the entire world.

The situation is no different in Germany and Europe. This is the reason why a right-wing professor like Baberowski encounters virtually no opposition in leading media and political circles, and is praised as a “renowned historian.”

As in the United States, the ruling elite is preparing for new wars. “In the coming years, Germany will face foreign policy and security challenges of which the country cannot even dream today, possibly not even in its worst nightmares.” Jan Techau, the director of a US think-tank in Berlin, wrote recently in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. According to Techau, Germans must therefore urgently be “forced to give up their neurotic desire for a morally clean foreign policy.”

What is currently taking place in Germany and Europe will end in catastrophe if young workers and students do not begin to seriously think through political issues and participate in the building of the IYSSE. As the youth organisation of the International Committee of the Fourth International, it is building a global movement that links the struggle against war, dictatorship and social attacks with the fight for socialism.



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