

Jörg Baberowski: A right-wing extremist professor

Johannes Stern
29 March 2017

A German court ruling has confirmed what the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) have been arguing for some time: Jörg Baberowski, who occupies the position of head of department for Eastern European history at Berlin's Humboldt University, can be referred to as a right-wing extremist. This was declared by the Cologne District Court in its ruling of March 15.

According to the court, Baberowski's positions provide a "sufficient starting point" for his designation as a "right-wing extremist." The judgment also makes explicitly clear that the criticism of the professor's statements by students was not "defamatory," "because the required reference to relevant material is present."

Last November, Baberowski sought an injunction from the Cologne court based on a leaflet and a press release issued by the general student committee (Asta) at the University of Bremen. The Asta, which represents the student body at Bremen University, issued these documents as part of a campaign to protest a planned lecture by Baberowski at the institution.

The court granted the injunction without hearing the Asta's arguments in the case. It prohibited the Asta from quoting Baberowski's attack on refugees and his reactionary theory of violence. It specifically banned the Asta from identifying the professor as a right-wing extremist.

The Asta subsequently filed an appeal against the injunction with the district court, which heard oral arguments on February 15. The court has now ruled that although the Bremen Asta cannot quote certain statements made by Baberowski, its appraisal of him as a right-wing extremist is permitted.

The ruling is all the more devastating since Baberowski, who lives and works in Berlin, sued the Bremen Asta in Cologne. The Cologne court has earned a reputation for "imposing publication bans on a regular basis" (*Frankfurter Rundschau*). Yet the case is so clear and Baberowski's far-right agenda so obvious that even the Cologne court did not

consider it possible to prohibit students from identifying Baberowski as a right-wing extremist.

Baberowski has declared his support for Ernst Nolte, the most well-known Nazi apologist among German historians of the post-war era. "Nolte was done an injustice. Historically speaking, he was right," he stated in a *Der Spiegel* article from early 2014. In the same article, the Humboldt University professor was cited as stating, "Hitler was no psychopath, he was not vicious. He did not want the extermination of the Jews to be discussed at his table."

In studying Baberowski's writings, one is confronted with the stench of revisionism. In an essay published in 2009, he wrote that a comparison of Stalinism and Nazism in relation to pre-war history is "not favourable to the Bolsheviks from a moral perspective." In other texts, the war of annihilation in the east against the Soviet Union during World War II is presented not as something planned by the Nazis, but as a war which was "imposed upon" the Wehrmacht by Stalin. In his latest book *Spaces of Violence*, he ventures to make the statement, "There were not even especially motivated anti-Semites in the military task forces."

Baberowski's downplaying of the Nazis and the crimes of the Third Reich are of a piece with his agitation against refugees and calls for war and violence.

The Bremen Asta cited, among other things, the following statement from an interview with Baberowski with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, "The integration of several million refugees in a short period of time disrupts our traditional continuity which holds a society together and ensures stability. [...] Common experiences, what we have read and observed—are the social bonds that once kept our society together."

In Germany, of all places, it is not necessary to explain the traditions in which such intellectual and political views stand. In the 1930s, the Nazis blustered about the "purity of the German racial corpus." The horrific consequences of this are well known.

The Bremen Asta continues to be prohibited, according to the ruling, from citing two quotes from Baberowski. The

Asta cited Baberowski as saying, “Wherever citizens are not involved, aggression arises naturally.” But the Asta omitted the following remarks from Baberowski, “Thank god, nobody has been killed yet in Germany.” Refugee centers had been burned, and this was bad enough, Baberowski added. “I believe that given the problems we currently have with immigration in Germany, what we have here is quite harmless.”

In the opinion of the court, these statements do not permit the conclusion that aggression towards refugees, in Baberowski’s view, is a “natural reaction of citizens excluded from the decision-making process,” as the Asta had claimed.

The Cologne court also upheld the prohibition on quoting the following statement made by Baberowski in October 2014 in a panel discussion at the German Historical Museum: “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.”

In the court’s opinion, Baberowski was “not exactly endorsing the use of the methods of warfare referred to in the passage cited.” Later Baberowski said in conclusion, “Then 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.”

Such rhetorical conditional statements are typical for the far right. If the methods of the terrorists are not used, so the argument goes, it will not be possible to defeat them. Moreover, it is very clear that Baberowski is not arguing as a concerned pacifist, who is warning against the methods of conquest in imperialist wars which violate international law, but as a cold-blooded warmonger. He maintains that Germany should only intervene militarily if it is prepared to act with more brutality than the enemy in order to win the conflict.

At the panel discussion in the German Historical Museum, which was revealingly entitled “Germany: an interventionist power?”, Baberowski repeatedly gave free rein to his warmongering and violent fantasies. “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,” he said.

However, if, by contrast, “state structures were completely destroyed by a long civil war,” one had to “realise that this will cost a lot of money and that soldiers and weapons have

to be sent into a power vacuum.” But the most important thing of all was that “for this, the political will and political strategy is required, and, above all, it has to be said that to make it work we have to go in there. And it has to be worth it. That costs money. We have to send soldiers in there. Countries like Iraq, Syria and Libya are no longer able to solve this problem themselves.”

The court’s argument that the students falsified this statement because they did not quote it in full is a legal travesty. The Bremen Asta will therefore launch an appeal to have the restriction lifted at a second hearing.

However, the much greater intellectual and political scandal is that Baberowski has been able to freely use his position at a university and a network of contacts among politicians and the media to spread his right-wing extremist positions, and that he has been assisted by a lazy and conformist academic community, which has defended him against all criticism. When the IYSSE chapter at Humboldt University pointed out the fascistic filth being promulgated by Baberowski’s department, the institute of history responded with vile slanders, and university management threatened to censor the group. The literary supplement of the conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published an article on the subject entitled “Trotskyist mobbing”.

The court ruling and the reactions it has provoked have left Baberowski’s defenders exposed. He has never been seen as a respected professor, but now he is associated for everyone with the right-wing extremist milieu in Germany and the United States. In recent days, the neo-fascist and Alternative for Germany politician Björn Höcke has defended him, along with the right-wing extremist magazine *Compact*, the far right daily *Junge Freiheit* and a number of right-wing blogs, including Politically Incorrect. Baberowski has previously been applauded by the far-right American web site Breitbart News and the *Daily Stormer*, a modern version of the Nazis anti-Semitic rag *Der Störmer*.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact