

Right-wing media mobilizes in support of Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski

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Right-wing media and fascistic organizations are rushing to defend Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski after the decision of the Cologne Regional Court that the Bremen University Students Union (Asta) is permitted to describe him as a “right-wing radical.”

This began at the end of March with a hysterical attack on the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the Socialist Equality Party (*Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei*, SGP) and the *World Socialist Web Site* by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ). Last weekend, the FAZ was followed by the extreme-right *National Zeitung*, the political magazine *Cicero* and the daily *Die Welt*.

What all these articles have in common is that they do not refer at all to the actual issues around which the dispute with Baberowski turns. An uninformed reader would never know that it involves statements from Baberowski that Hitler was not cruel, that Stalin forced the Wehrmacht (Hitler’s Army) to conduct a war of extermination, and that the integration of refugees threatens the bonds of society. Instead, all the articles combine half-truths and outright lies with baseless slanders of the IYSSE.

Cicero magazine claims that the IYSSE (whose name it consistently cites wrongly as IYSSEE) is a small group at Humboldt University, which represents “only 0.1 percent” of the students. In fact, after a campaign focused on the fight against militarism, the IYSSE won 7 percent of the vote in the most recent student parliament elections—more than the Greens, the Left Party and the Christian Democratic Student Association. Hundreds of students attend its events.

Cicero accuses the IYSSE of conducting “psychological terror at the university,” intimidating professors, believing in conspiracy theories and advocating views that were responsible for the construction of “gulags and labour camps.” The *National Zeitung* accuses the Trotskyist youth organization of a “bullying campaign” and “witch-hunt.”

The wildest claims are being made by Baberowski himself. In an interview in the Springer daily *Die Welt* on Monday, under the headline, “Left-wing extremists do not want to understand anything but just denounce,” he insults the IYSSE as a “small Stalinist sect, which consists of a few old men and three or four students who do not know what they are doing.”

The professor, who has himself engaged with Stalinism for

years, knows full well the difference between Stalinism and Trotskyism, its most consistent socialist opponent. He knows just as well as *Cicero* author Klaus-Rüdiger Mai that the Trotskyists did not build the gulag, but rather were its first victims. The hatred of Trotskyists was instilled in Baberowski as a student, when he glorified Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot as a member of the Maoist KBW.

But that does not stop him from lying and slandering without restraint. In this, he has descended to an intellectual level that defies description. For example, he told *Die Welt*, “These Stalinists [meaning the IYSSE] are evil, they are causing damage, destroying other people’s lives. They do not care about what their victims say or write.” He added, “The left-wing extremists do not read any books, they do not want to understand anything but just denounce and stigmatize. One should ignore them and leave them to their stupidity.”

In fact, Baberowski’s critics not only read books, they have written some too. The book *Scholarship or War Propaganda?*, published in August 2015 by Mehring Verlag, meticulously documented the dispute with Baberowski and his colleague Herfried Münkler at Humboldt University.

The book contains a 40-page essay, “Jörg Baberowski’s falsification of history,” written by the national spokesman for the IYSSE, Christoph Vandreier. It carefully documents Baberowski’s career; the influences of Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer on his irrationalist theory of history; his theory of violence; his falsification of the October Revolution; his de-contextualization of Stalinism; and his relativization of Nazi crimes.

This essay was written before Baberowski came to prominence in the refugee crisis as a political stooge of the extreme right. This subsequent evolution has fully confirmed Vandreier’s assessment that Baberowski is a right-wing ideologue.

Anyone who still thinks Baberowski’s defenders are concerned with protecting an unjustly maligned professor, or—as the Presidium of Humboldt University said in a statement—“free and independent scientific exchange,” should read Baberowski’s interview in *Die Welt*. Unwilling to deal with a single issue concerning the substance of the IYSSE’s criticism, the professor reacts with a foul-mouthed torrent of insults and slander.

Baberowski, who at the height of the refugee crisis rushed from

talk show to talk show and interview to interview, seeks to present himself, in the style of the extreme right-wing, as a victim of a media campaign. “In September 2015, at the height of the state-orchestrated welcome euphoria [for refugees], however, I was perceived by the guardians of public virtue in politics and in the media as a troublemaker who had to be excluded from the conversation.”

It is no coincidence that Baberowski’s interview in *Die Welt* was immediately and eagerly taken up on Twitter by the extreme right. The Federation of Expellees activist Erika Steinbach circulated the article, as did the Berlin Regional Association of the Alternative for Germany (AfD). The anti-refugee journalist Ramin Peymani said, “I have the greatest respect for a person who cannot and will not let himself be intimidated by the left-wing mob.”

The FAZ, *Die Welt* and *Cicero*, which are now mobilizing openly for Baberowski, are part of the right-conservative political spectrum. The FAZ provided Nolte with a platform in the *Historikerstreit* (Historians’ Dispute) in the 1980s. It also published the article by Baberowski that, according to the judgement of the Cologne Regional Court, provides a “sufficient material starting point” for evaluating him as a “right-wing radical.”

The magazine *Cicero*, once considered conservative, has moved further to the right since 2015. Since then, “texts in *Cicero* approach the right fringe,” wrote the daily *taz*. Newsweekly *Der Spiegel* described the publisher of the magazine as a “Salon rabble-rouser,” and *Freitag* publisher Jakob Augstein accused the editor of “racial propaganda.”

Die Welt is the flagship of Springer Verlag, whose publications in the 1960s campaigned so hatefully against the protest movement that many held it responsible for the assassination attempt on Rudi Dutschke. Sven Felix Kellerhoff, who conducted the interview with Baberowski, wrote in *Die Welt* in February, in the spirit of Nolte, that “communism” had been “more devastating than Hitler’s racial hatred and his delusion about ‘Lebensraum in the East’.”

In 2016, the Bavarian State Secret Service attested that the *National Zeitung* spread “xenophobic, nationalist and revisionist arguments.” Wolfgang Karbaum, the author of the article on Baberowski, is an avowed partisan of Nolte and even wrote a song in praise of the Nazi apologist in August last year, on the occasion of his death.

However, less conservative newspapers and academics, with very few exceptions, have also refused to criticize Baberowski. Many remain silent. An exception to the general silence is *Die Zeit*, which published a full-page article about the dispute, with which we will deal separately.

There can be no doubt that Baberowski has become a central figure in the new right in recent years. In countless articles, on talk shows and in interviews, he has agitated against refugees and called for a strong state. Above all, he has made it his mission to rehabilitate the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte, who was largely isolated by the *Historikerstreit*.

“Nolte was done an injustice,” Baberowski said in February 2014 in *Der Spiegel*. “Historically speaking, he was right.” To support his thesis, he added: “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.”

The belittlement of Nazism runs right through Baberowski’s writings. As early as 2009, he had declared that, from a moral perspective, the comparison between Bolshevism and Nazism did not fall “in favour of the Bolsheviks,” when you tell their pre-war history.

Baberowski declares that the war of extermination by the Nazis in the east was a result of the violent space (*Gewaltraum*) created by the Soviet Union. “Stalin and his generals forced upon the Wehrmacht a new type of war, in which civilians were no longer spared,” he wrote in 2007. He explicitly denies that fascist ideology and anti-Semitism played a significant role. “Hitler’s soldiers did not conduct an ideological war, but fought a war whose dynamics they no longer escaped,” he wrote in 2012 in his book *Verbrannte Erde* (*Scorched Earth*).

The support given to Baberowski and the silence on his positions show that such right-wing views can command the support of the majority of the media and academic world, or at least be accepted. This can only be explained by fundamental political changes.

A quarter century after German reunification and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the intellectual and cultural level has fallen so low that statements that would have triggered outrage then are now supported or tolerated, and critics are accused of “bullying” and “witch-hunting.”

For some years, leading German politicians have advocated that Germany must end its military restraint and play a role in the world commensurate with its economic strength. Such a return to militarism and Great Power politics requires a revision of history. “It is difficult to conduct a responsible policy in Europe if you have the idea: We have been to blame for everything,” wrote Baberowski’s colleague Herfried Münkler two years ago. Münkler has said that he would like to see Germany take on the role of the European “hegemon” and “disciplinarian.”

The aim is to whitewash German imperialism of its crimes in order to prepare new crimes and new wars. In this, Baberowski and his defenders play an important role.



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