

German Professor Baberowski explains his far-right agenda

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In a long interview that appeared May 20 in the feuilleton of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski explains his far-right agenda.

The interview makes clear why Baberowski insists on his statement that “Hitler was not vicious,” which he first made three years ago in *Der Spiegel* and repeated recently in the journal *Forschung und Lehre (Research & Teaching)*. His aim is to break the “cultural hegemony of the left,” as he calls it, in order to build up the right. According to him, the trivialization of Nazi crimes and the advocacy of war, racism and nationalism should no longer be “morally discredited” and considered a “taboo.”

The first half of the interview consists of fierce attacks on the alleged “hegemony of the left.” “The left has struggled and imposed cultural hegemony as defined by Antonio Gramsci,” Baberowski declares, and then complains of the absence of conservatives such as Franz Josef Strauss (a Bavarian reactionary), who “proudly said he was a conservative and a right-winger.”

“Who dares to say today he is a right-winger?” Baberowski asks. “A right-winger, well, that’s someone like a pedophile or a child molester.” The concept “serves primarily as a verbal means of defamation, in order to exclude those who think differently from the democratic consensus.”

This “shift of coordinates” could succeed only “because the left has gained the upper hand in public discourse and is the only force to determine who is left and who is right.” Both liberals and conservatives “were subject to these rules.”

In “civil institutions, in the media, education, the universities,” the “cultural hegemony of the left is structurally secured in such a way that resistance is

futile,” the professor continues.

“Particularly in the bourgeois milieu, most people speak the same standardized language and strive not to violate the requirements of the diktat of the virtuous... And when finally everyone speaks the same language, then thinking is subjected to *Gleichschaltung* (enforced conformity).”

The “world of business” has also “adapted itself to the hegemonic discourse in a way inconceivable some decades ago.” Economic liberals and leftist romantics who believe in improving the world applaud “for various reasons the opening up of borders to everyone. Some seek boundless profit, others dream of a world society.”

Baberowski is here defending the classic themes of the extreme right. Again and again he emphasizes that one must “reckon with being excluded from public discourse” when one expresses an opinion on questions of immigration, Muslims or Trump that conflicts with the “hegemony of the politically correct” and the “diktat of the virtuous.”

At one point he says: “Anyone who judges racism, colonialism, war and peace or the relationship of the sexes differently than hegemonic discourse allows is morally discredited.” Baberowski’s objections to a “hegemonic discourse” that rejects racism, colonialism and war can be interpreted only as support for them.

The same passage of the interview reveals why Baberowski so obstinately trivialises the person of Hitler. He accuses the “sixty-eight generation”—who in 1968 protested against the silence of their parents and took up the issue of Nazi crimes—of laying “the foundations for moralizing politics” by “deciding what could be said about the past and how it could be said.”

The following sentence clearly expresses the far-right core of Baberowski’s position: “Since then, resistance

to a dead dictator is sufficient ground to assume the moral high ground over other people.”

“Resistance to a dead dictator,” i.e., rejection of Hitler, has for decades been part of the basic political consensus in post-World War II Germany. Baberowski wants to change that. The views of a Nazi apologist, such as the leading member of the far-right Alternative for Germany, Björn Höcke, would then be an equally legitimate part of public discourse as the views of Hitler’s opponents. Indeed, such views are preferable since they do not bow to the “interpretive authority” of the left and the “*Gleichschaltung* of thought.” It is no wonder that the AfD has prominently publicised Baberowski’s *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* interview on Twitter.

In February 2014, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) addressed an Open Letter to the administration of Humboldt University pointing out that “Baberowski is utilizing his position at the university to advance the notorious right-wing conceptions of Ernst Nolte, who for three decades has been associated with writings that seek to relativize and diminish the significance of Nazi crimes.”

The letter referred to an article in *Der Spiegel* in which Baberowski claimed that Nolte was “historically right.” He also declared, “Hitler was no psychopath and he wasn’t vicious.”

Ever since, Baberowski has sought to portray himself as the victim of a campaign of character assassination, responding to his critics with vile slanders and, in the case of the Bremen student association, Asta, with a court case. He does the same in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* interview. He denounces the IYSSE, a Trotskyist youth organization, as a “Stalinist sect” that uses the “instruments of hegemonic discourse to draw attention to itself.” One could laugh at such pronouncements from a professor who has access to the entire media landscape, if the issues at stake were not so serious.

In its open letter to the Humboldt University administration in 2014, the IYSSE also wrote: “The revival of German militarism requires a new interpretation of history that downplays the crimes of the Nazi era.”

This has since been confirmed. It is increasingly clear that Germany cannot return to great power politics and

militarism without rehabilitating Hitler. Timur Vermes’ recent novel *Look Who’s Back* and the film based on the book are proving to be highly current.

This is why Baberowski is defended by almost the entire media and by the university administration, despite the fact that his far-right positions are unmistakable and were recently confirmed by a court ruling. Students and workers, however, reject such views with horror and disgust.



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