

Trump, Charlottesville and Jorg Baberowski

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“Hitler was not a psychopath, he was not vicious. He did not want to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table.”

“Wherever many people come from foreign backgrounds and the population is not involved in regulating these problems, aggression will naturally arise.”

It is clear how German politicians and editorialists would respond if Donald Trump posted these statements on Twitter or said them at a press conference. They would condemn them as an attempt to downplay the crimes of Hitler and the Nazis.

Indeed, after Trump embraced the fascist mob in Charlottesville, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) candidate for chancellor in next month’s parliamentary elections, Martin Schulz, denounced Trump’s “downplaying of Nazi violence.” The cover of the current issue of *Der Spiegel* depicts Trump wearing a Ku Klux Klan robe and proclaims: “This is Donald Trump’s true face.”

It is difficult to overstate the hypocrisy of the German ruling class. When the right-wing extremist German Professor Jörg Baberowski, the source of the statements cited at the beginning of this commentary, trivializes the crimes of the Nazis and endorses right-wing violence, there is no outcry from the political or media establishment. On the contrary, these very same circles slander and seek to censor those critical voices that are raised in opposition to Baberowski’s pro-Nazi apologetics—above all the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Under the protection of influential forces in the realms of politics, the media and the military, Baberowski has for years been using his position at Humboldt University to agitate against refugees, argue in favour of illegal methods of war, and whitewash the Nazis. His right-wing extremist statements go well beyond anything Trump has said publicly. Baberowski is, for example, a declared supporter of Ernst Nolte, the

most well known Nazi apologist among post-World War II historians. “Nolte was done an injustice. Historically speaking, he was right,” Baberowski told *Der Spiegel* in 2014.

The stench of historical revisionism pours out of Baberowski’s “scholarly” works. In an essay published in 2009, he wrote that a comparison between the pre-World War II history of Stalinism and Nazism did not “favour the Bolsheviks from a moral perspective.” He argues that Hitler’s war of annihilation in the east was not planned by the Nazis, but “imposed upon” the German Wehrmacht by Stalin. In his latest book, *Spaces of Violence*, he goes so far as to make the incredible statement: “There were not especially motivated anti-Semites in the [German] military task forces.”

Baberowski’s downplaying of Nazi crimes is combined with calls for war and violence. In a panel discussion at the German Historical Museum on the topic “Germany—an interventionist power?” he said in regard to combatting non-state actors such as the Taliban in Afghanistan and ISIS in Syria and Iraq, “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. Then it is better to keep out altogether.”

Baberowski is celebrated for his inhumane statements by the far-right in Germany, who embrace him as one of their own. But this is not limited to the neo-fascist milieu in Germany. He is also hailed by the right-wing extremist forces in the US that carried out the fascist rampage in Charlottesville.

In December 2015, the far-right website Breitbart News, led by Trump’s recently deposed chief strategist Stephen Bannon, wrote that the “highly respected” professor was warning against the disappearance of Germany as we know it. Breitbart approvingly cited an

excerpt from an interview Baberowski gave to the *Huffington Post*, which included the comment: “Germany will no longer be able to stay out of wars and conflicts. And the Germany that we know will disappear due to mass immigration.”

The neo-Nazi propaganda site Daily Stormer, which played a leading role in Charlottesville, identified Baberowski as a kindred spirit at about the same time. It cited his racist attacks on the German government’s refugee policy, including the following statement: “It was unwise to take selfies with refugees that were shared around the world, and it was also unwise to declare to the world that anybody can come to Germany because we are not allowed to have an upper limit.”

Why are the same media outlets that criticise Trump so vociferously defending the right-wing extremist Professor Baberowski in Germany? The answer is simple: Because they are preparing the same policies as those being pursued by Trump in the US.

Trump is not an individual phenomenon. He is the outcome of unending wars and uninterrupted attacks on the working class. His government of billionaires, generals and fascists exposes the true face of American capitalism. The US ruling class can defend its wealth and power only by threatening its international rivals with nuclear annihilation and its own working class with fascism.

This is producing friction and conflicts within the ruling elite. Trump’s critics within the political establishment and the state fear that social opposition will get out of control if Trump embraces the fascistic right too openly. But the policies of war, torture and drone assassinations, the enrichment of Wall Street at the expense of the working class, and the construction of an apparatus of surveillance and repression were not invented by Trump. They were initiated by his predecessors—Bush Sr. and Jr., Clinton and Obama.

Germany’s ruling class is responding to the global capitalist crisis with the same measures. The very week Baberowski declared that Hitler was “not vicious,” German President Gauck, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defence Minister Von der Leyen proclaimed the “end of military restraint.” Ever since, the build-up of the military and the domestic forces of repression has been pursued relentlessly.

The revival of German militarism necessitates the

downplaying of its historic crimes. Baberowski’s colleague, Herfried Münkler, told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 2014: “It is virtually impossible to pursue a responsible policy in Europe if one has the idea that we were guilty for everything. With regard to 1914, this is a legend.”

All of the established parties agree on this issue. Baberowski is not only a welcome guest at the Christian Democratic Union-aligned Konrad Adenauer Foundation, he has been invited to participate in panel discussions by the Greens and the Left Party. The Social Democratic president of Humboldt University, Sabine Kunst, threatened Baberowski’s critics with criminal prosecution, even though a court subsequently ruled that Baberowski can legitimately be described as a “right-wing extremist.”

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP—Socialist Equality Party) and its youth organisation, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), are the only political organizations that have publicly opposed Baberowski’s right-wing extremist positions from the outset and warned of their consequences—now displayed so shockingly in Charlottesville. The representatives of German imperialism can point their fingers at Trump as often as they like, but many workers and youth now know that CDU Chancellor Angela Merkel, SPD candidate Schulz, the Left Party’s Oskar Lafontaine and their fellow capitalist politicians, “left” as well as right, are pursuing the same reactionary policies.

The experience of the rise of fascism in Germany demonstrated that the danger of war and fascist dictatorship could be combatted only by the independent mobilisation of the working class on the basis of a socialist programme. The SGP is using the German federal election campaign, in concert with its sister parties in North America, Europe and Asia, to expose the war-mongers on both sides of the Atlantic and construct a powerful socialist movement of the international working class.



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