

AfD deputy denounces a Holocaust commemoration in German parliament

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Seventy-four years after the liberation of Auschwitz, the crimes of the Nazi regime are being downplayed in the German Bundestag (parliament) without triggering any significant protest.

On the morning of January 31, the Bundestag honored the victims of German National Socialism (Nazism) at an annual ceremony. Immediately afterwards, far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) parliamentarian Marc Jongen delivered a fascistic speech in which he downplayed the crimes of the Nazis and derided their victims. This did not evoke any noteworthy opposition, underscoring how far to the right the entire political establishment has moved and the degree to which the right-wing extremists of the AfD now dominate official politics.

Jongen, who gained a doctorate in philosophy under Peter Sloterdijk and is considered the “chief ideologue” of the AfD, spoke against a motion tabled by the Left Party to establish a central “memorial for the victims of the Nazi war of annihilation in Eastern Europe.” In addition to millions of soldiers who died, 6 million civilians were killed in Poland alone, 14 million were killed in the Soviet Union, and 3.3 million prisoners of war perished.

Jongen opposed the project on the grounds that it was aimed at “artificially inducing the re-traumatization of every new generation in Germany” and that it ignored “the German and Eastern European victims of the Stalinist war of extermination,” who, he said, were the victims of a “no less terrible crime.”

Jongen equated the victims of the Nazi war of extermination with the losses that resulted from the Soviet Red Army’s offensive, which liberated Europe from Nazi rule. He also depicted the Nazis’ minutely planned war of annihilation as a response to Stalinist acts of violence, and, in the old tradition of the Nazis, justified it as a “preventive war.”

Jonger relied explicitly on the right-wing Humboldt University historian Jörg Baberowski, whom he quoted word for word. In 2011, Professor Baberowski wrote, “...without [taking into account] the excesses of the Stalinist dictatorship, it is not at all understandable what National Socialism [Nazism] was an answer to.”

Jonger followed this blatant historical falsification with a

fascistic tirade. The commemoration of Nazi crimes was used to “anchor a deep sense of guilt in Germany for all time,” said the AfD speaker. “Germany should disappear as a nation, as a country, as a people. It should become a more or less open settlement area for migrants from all over the world,” Jongen railed, adopting the formulas of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.

This marked the third time since the beginning of the year that right-wing extremists and neo-Nazis have besmirched the memory of the victims of Nazism, without provoking any outcry in establishment political or media circles. AfD members disrupted a commemoration in the Bavarian state parliament on January 23, and on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, Polish right-wing extremists demonstrated on the grounds of the concentration camp, shouting anti-Semitic slogans. Jongen has now transported this ideological filth into the Bundestag.

The political conditions for these fascistic and anti-Semitic displays by right-wing extremists were created by the more traditional bourgeois parties, which tolerate the AfD and adopt its policies. Not a single member of parliament spoke substantively against Jongen’s apologia for the Nazis and not a single newspaper deemed it necessary to report on, let alone denounce, his hate speech.

This toleration of fascist agitation in the Bundestag is the result of a process that has made right-wing extremist positions politically acceptable. Baberowski has played a central role in the project to rehabilitate the Nazis.

In 2007, Baberowski wrote: “Stalin and his generals forced a new type of war on the Wehrmacht [Hitler’s army], which no longer spared the civilian population.” In February 2014, in an interview published in *Der Spiegel*, Baberowski defended the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte, who had triggered the Historians’ Dispute [*Historikerstreit*] in the 1980s with his exculpation of the Nazis.

“Nolte was wronged,” Baberowski said. “Historically, he was right.” He continued: “Hitler was not a psychopath, he was not cruel. He didn’t want people talking about the extermination of the Jews at his table.”

He also likened shootings in Russia in 1918 to the Holocaust, saying, “Basically, it was the same thing: industrial homicide.”

In response to Baberowski's justification of Nazi crimes, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP—Socialist Equality Party) and its youth organisation, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), issued an open letter to the Humboldt University administration and protested against the falsification of history. In the letter, they pointed out that the rehabilitation of Hitler serves to justify German militarism today:

The attempts to establish a historically false narrative come at a critical point in German history. Such efforts should be seen in the context of recent statements by President Joachim Gauck and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier that it is now time to end decades of military restraint in Germany. The revival of German militarism requires a new interpretation of history that downplays the crimes of the Nazi era.

In 1987, Nolte's positions triggered the *Historikerstreit*, in which many historians opposed Nolte. But in 2014, not a single professor and not a single mainstream newspaper opposed the statement that Hitler was not vicious.

Instead, the SGP and the IYSSE were attacked for criticising Baberowski in *Der Spiegel*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and many other newspapers.

Rejecting an action brought by Baberowski against his critics, the Cologne Higher Regional Court ruled that Baberowski could legitimately be described as a “right-wing extremist,” a “racist” and someone who engages in “glorifying violence.” The professor's lawyers then advanced the argument that while Baberowski's speech might be radically right-wing, his research was sound. This fraudulent separation of Baberowski's aggressive political agenda and writings from his public declarations was promoted by the political establishment and the Humboldt University administration.

“The scholarly statements of Jörg Baberowski are not radically right-wing,” said the Social Democratic politician and president of Humboldt University Sabine Kunst in an official statement following Baberowski's defeat in the Cologne Higher Regional Court. At the same time, she threatened critics with criminal proceedings and declared “media attacks” on Baberowski to be “unacceptable.”

Jongen's speech confirms the critical importance of the struggle that the SGP and the IYSSE have carried out at Humboldt University. It leaves no doubt as to the thrust of Baberowski's falsification of history and, at the same time, demonstrates once again that the right wing can act so brazenly only because nobody in the political establishment or in the academic community opposes it.

This silence extends beyond Germany. There is not a single prominent academic in either Britain or the United States who

has publicly attacked Baberowski. It is not that they agree with Baberowski. In fact, this writer can testify to the fact that a number of respected historians have expressed in private conversations their distaste for the work of the Humboldt University professor. But they are not prepared to “go on the record” and denounce his pro-Nazi apologetics.

The refusal to forcefully oppose Baberowski has—as the rise of the AfD demonstrates—political consequences. In his valuable study *The Anatomy of Fascism*, published in 2004, historian Robert O. Paxton called attention to the insidious complicity of a significant stratum of intellectuals with the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy. The hostility of intellectuals to Enlightenment ideals “helped create a space for fascist values” and “made it possible to imagine fascism,” he wrote. The present-day silence of academics on pro-Nazi apologetics and refusal to counter historical falsifications has “helped create a space” for a dangerous fascist revival.

In the book *Why Are They Back?*, which deals extensively with the disputes at Humboldt University, I have written that the AfD, in contrast to the Nazis, “has neither a mass base of support nor combat-ready units like Hitler's SA (Storm Troopers), which recruited its members among uprooted war veterans, socially ruined members of the petty-bourgeoisie, and despairing unemployed workers. The AfD's strength arises exclusively from the support it receives from the political parties, the media, the government and the state apparatus.”

The SGP was and remains the only party that opposes this right-wing conspiracy. For this reason, it was referred to as “left-wing extremist” and listed as an “object for surveillance” in last year's Secret Service annual report, which was prepared in close consultation with the AfD. The building of the SGP is the only basis upon which the right-wing conspiracy can be stopped.



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