German government defends right-wing extremist Professor Jörg Baberowski

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In an official statement, the German government has backed the far-right Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski and his colleague Herfried Münkler.

In a statement on the 70th anniversary of the “Basic Law” (as Germany’s post-World War II constitution is called), which was published on the official website of the federal ministry of education and research and which appeared in several newspapers, Science Minister Anja Karliczek (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) writes, “In Germany, the freedom of scholarship is a fundamental right. It goes hand in hand with freedom of expression [...] This also includes the imposition of other opinions. Opinions like those of Professor Münkler and Professor Baberowski from Berlin [...] who were attacked.”

The “opinions” of the professors, which should now be regarded as “reasonable” according to the federal government, are well known. Following the death of his role model Ernst Nolte, Baberowski, Professor of Eastern European History at Humboldt University, is the most well-known Nazi apologist among German historians.

”Hitler was not a psychopath, he was not vicious. He did not want to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table,” he declared in 2014 in Germany’s major newsweekly *Der Spiegel*. His “scholarly” writings are also marked by a trivialisation of Nazism and the crimes of the Third Reich.

Meanwhile, a best-seller has revealed that Baberowski's revisionist history goes hand in hand with the far-right agenda he prosecutes politically. The book by *Die Zeit* authors Christian Fuchs and Paul Middelhoff, “The Network of the New Right”, identifies Baberowski as the initiator of a right-wing discussion group, which includes, in addition to the social democratic racist Thilo Sarrazin, far-right journalists such as Dieter Stein (*Junge Freiheit*), Karlheinz Weißmann (*Cato*) and Frank Böckelmann (*tumult*).

The book explains, “From the Baberowski circle and its fellow campaigners” also came “the idea for the '2018 Joint Declaration,'“ which lashes out at supposed “illegal mass immigration” and solidarizes itself with xenophobic demonstrations.

Münkler too, following his retirement, moves more and more openly in extreme right circles. At the beginning of the year, he spoke at the invitation of the then far-right Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) Defence Minister Mario Kusanek at the “New Year Security Policy Conference” in Austria.

It is no surprise that the social democrat Münkler is considered a major figure among right-wing militarists. In his book, “Macht in der Mitte” (“Power in the Middle”), he demands that Germany, as leader of a core Europe, must play the role of a “taskmaster” on the continent. In numerous articles and interviews, he praises combat drones and poison gas as “humane weapons” and complains that young people in the “post-heroic societies” of the West are no longer willing to sacrifice their lives in imperialist wars.

While such “opinions”—the trivialization of Hitler and drumming up of support for the return of German militarism—are protected under the constitution, according to the government, criticism of these views apparently is not. “Controversial discussions must be possible everywhere, but certainly where the confrontation with pros and cons has their home—at the universities,” writes Karliczek. “However, the prerequisite is that discussions and interlocutors conduct their discourse on the basis of the liberal democratic constitutional order.”

The government's open partisanship for Münkler and Baberowski confirms the warnings of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and the *World Socialist Web Site*. Under conditions of the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, the preparation of new wars and growing conflicts between the major powers, the ruling class is returning aggressively to its old authoritarian and fascist traditions, the politics of militarism, boosting the power of the state at home and abroad, and conducting a policy of social devastation against the resistance of the population.

Baberowski has long demanded that students who criticize his right-wing rabble rousing and propaganda be removed from the university and muzzled. In early 2017, he sued the Bremen AStA (students' union) because it had protested

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against his right-wing extremist positions.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) politician and Humboldt University (HU) President Sabine Kunst had already backed Baberowski at that time. After his defeat in court, in a statement by the university administration she threatened that they would no longer tolerate criticism of the "outstanding scholar" Baberowski and other HU professors, and warned that critics would possibly be prosecuted. Last summer, at the behest of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), Kunst sued the HU's student body to force the publishing of comprehensive lists of politically active students.

The current offensive is also taking place in close cooperation with the extreme right. Last May, the AfD parliamentary group in the Bundestag (federal parliament) tabled a question to the government condemning student criticism of Münkler and Baberowski and calling on the government "to protect the freedom of scholarship [being] endangered by political correctness".

What drives the AfD—a party that calls Nazism just so much "bird shit in over 1,000 years of successful German history" and which calls for a "180 degree turn in commemorative policy"—is clear. AfD parliamentary deputies like Marc Jongen and its chairman Alexander Gauland regularly refer to Münkler and Baberowski in their fascistic Bundestag speeches in order to relativise the crimes of German imperialism and to drum up support for an aggressive German foreign and great power policy.

The current issue of the right-wing political magazine *Cicero* centers on a defence of Münkler and Baberowski, which was also closely coordinated with the government parties.

In an article entitled "Scholarship as a question of character", the SPD politician Mathias Brodkorb defends Baberowski in the name of "scholarly freedom". The "*reductio ad Hitlerum,*" the "typical German form of moralizing defamation," lies about its opponents seep "from all the cracks," he complains.

It takes the intellectual depravity of a German Social Democrat to utilise completely misplaced arguments in Latin for the sole purpose of defending a far-right professor. Baberowski is not being "defamed" by a misplaced association in relation to Hitler. He is being criticized for trivialising him and the crimes of the Nazis.

The backing of the entire political establishment for Münkler and Baberowski encourages them to make increasingly aggressive statements. Speaking to *Cicero*, Münkler first spreads the lie that the "Trotskyists" threatened to stand him up against the wall during the "university revolts" in the late 1960s. Only then to call himself for violence against political opponents: No, he replied, "before that I will put a bullet in your head."

Baberowski too, who himself threatens his own students and colleagues who criticize him, is making increasingly inflammatory statements. SGP vice-chair Christoph Vandreier recently presented his book *Why Are They Back?*, which describes the case of Baberowski and shows how the rise of the AfD was ideologically and politically prepared by professors, the media and establishment political parties, in Berlin's Heinrich Böll library. In response, Baberowski posted the following entry on his Facebook page:

"Berlin's Central Library in Greifswalder Strasse permits violent left-wing extremists, who are being monitored by the German intelligence service, to appear in front of an audience and spread hate. Vandreier is a particularly malicious psychopath. One could have known. Or are such fascists invited to hold a lecture, because the dirt they spread is appreciated?"

Such defamatory statements, in the style of the AfD, make clear the extreme right-wing forces the German government is defending and with what methods it works to suppress the growing political opposition among workers and youth. If there is someone "spreading hatred and filth," revitalizing fascism and attacking the fundamental right to freedom of expression and acting against dissenters with state violence, it is the ruling class.

The SGP is named in the current secret service report as an "object of surveillance" for the sole "crime" of publicly promoting a socialist programme, which, according to the secret service, is directed "against the existing, generalized as 'capitalist' state and social order, against the EU, against supposed nationalism, imperialism and militarism."

The SGP has filed a lawsuit against the secret service and calls on all those who defend democratic rights and oppose the return of militarism and fascism to support it in the suit against the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, as Germany's secret service is called.

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