

A letter to the New York Times on the resurgence of anti-Semitism in Germany

David North
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World Socialist Web Site *International Editorial Board* Chairman David North sent this letter to journalist James Angelos in response to his article “The New German Anti-Semitism,” published in the New York Times Magazine.

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Dear Mr. Angelos,

I have read with interest your report, published in the *New York Times Magazine* and featured on the front page of the newspaper’s May 29, 2019 international edition, on the resurgence of anti-Semitism in Germany. You are apparently well-informed on the subject, which has been scandalously under-reported in the American press.

However, given the length of your article and the fact that you are based in Berlin, I could not help but be surprised that you omitted from your report any mention of the statements and activities of Professor Jörg Baberowski, the chairman of the Department of East European Studies at Berlin’s Humboldt University. It is an undeniable political fact that the resurgence of the neo-Nazi right, under the cover of the *Alternative für Deutschland*, has been facilitated by an on-going process of historical revisionism in which Baberowski now plays, since the death of the notorious Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte, the leading role.

The lack of any reference to Baberowski is all the more striking as you specifically, and correctly, call attention to the fact that “AfD politicians have often relativized Nazi crimes to counteract what some of them call a national ‘guilt cult.’” You also report the notorious statement of Alexander Gauland, an AfD leader, who described the Nazi era as “only a bird poop in over 1,000 years of successful German history.”

But Gauland’s statement is the product of a

dangerous development among German academics, which is particularly advanced at Berlin’s Humboldt University. Professor Jörg Baberowski has led the contemporary movement to “relativize” the Holocaust, i.e., to portray it as merely one of many incidents of mass killings in the twentieth century. Veering into an outright apology for the crimes of the Nazis, Baberowski presents the Holocaust as an understandable response to the alleged barbarism of the Soviet Union. This virulently anti-communist version of history—thoroughly in line with the justifications offered by the Nazi leaders for their extermination program—was discredited in the 1980s in the course of the landmark “Historikerstreit.” But historical revisionism is now a major intellectual and political force in Germany.

In February 2014, Baberowski declared in an interview published in *Der Spiegel*: “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.”

Baberowski is not a fringe figure in German academic life. He is presently among the most prominent historians in Germany, a media celebrity invited frequently to appear as a guest on prime-time television programs. His views on history and politics influence and serve to legitimize the AfD and people like Gauland. Baberowski has an avid following among right-wingers all over the world, who publicize his denunciations of immigrants. His pronouncements have been reported by *Breitbart News* and *DailyStormer*, the vicious on-line Nazi publication.

Even though he was compelled to withdraw a libel suit after a German court ruled that the professor could be legitimately described as a right-wing extremist, Baberowski is intransigently defended by the Humboldt

University administration, which has publicly declared that criticism of his views by students is unacceptable. The present government's minister for education, Anja Karliczek, issued an official statement as recently as May 23 denouncing criticism of Baberowski as an attack on freedom of thought and opinion. In the context of German history and politics, this declaration by a government minister that Baberowski's defense of Hitler represents a legitimate and even unchallengeable "opinion" that students must not be allowed to criticize effectively clears the path for a state-sponsored positive reevaluation of the Third Reich. The minister's statement has been followed by a cover story published in the latest edition of the right-wing German magazine *Cicero* denouncing students and, in particular, the German Socialist Equality Party, for their exposure of Baberowski.

The case of Baberowski is not only a German matter. There seems to be an effort underway to provide Baberowski with international academic legitimacy. He has recently been the recipient of an extraordinary \$300,000 grant by Princeton University to pursue his study of "Dictatorships in Transition". Princeton University has refused to offer any explanation for its support for the work of a Nazi apologist.

If you are interested in following up your article with a serious examination of the increasingly dangerous intellectual environment in Germany—specifically, the process of pro-Nazi historical revisionism—I suggest that you review the extensive writings of the *World Socialist Web Site* on historical revisionism and its relationship to the resurgence of neo-Nazi anti-Semitism. Permit me also to suggest that you obtain a copy of the recently published book by Christoph Vandreier, *Why are They Back? Historical Falsification, Political Conspiracy, and the Return of Fascism in Germany*. Vandreier, a leader of the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* (SGP) in Germany, recently toured the United States, where he spoke at major US university campuses on the role played by historical falsification in the growth of fascism. These lectures were well attended by students, who are deeply concerned by the worldwide resurgence of fascism and all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism. A video of Vandreier's lecture at Wayne State University in Detroit on April 11, 2019 can be accessed at <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2019/05/22/vide->

m22.html.

Sincerely yours,
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