

German daily defends right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski

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Following the abject failure in June of right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski's attempt to establish a reactionary center for the research into dictatorships at Berlin's Humboldt University, it was only a matter of time before his house organ, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (F.A.Z.), published an angry opinion piece on the subject.

This finally occurred earlier this month. In the August 8 edition of F.A.Z., the headline emblazoned on the front page of the newspaper's cultural section read, "The cowardice of scholarship." The author, Hannah Bethke, not only attacks the opposition among students to Baberowski's project. She also attacks university management for having capitulated to them in a "cowardly" manner.

Bethke described the criticism from the students as "a consciously targeted campaign of defamation against a politically uncomfortable professor," i.e., Jörg Baberowski, and asked whether university officialdom "should in this case have a duty to care for its tenured staff and employees." She rages at the end of her article, "It would do the university good to stand up for academic freedom and progress instead of cravenly capitulating to the *zeitgeist*, which wants to confine them to a political straitjacket."

This mantra of the far-right is all too familiar. While Bethke considers militarist, authoritarian and anti-refugee propaganda to be protected by academic freedom and even deems such positions to be "progressive," she describes any criticism as defamation. Although she complains that university officials have "never explained the content of the considerations that in their opinion spoke for or against the creation of such a research centre," she never utters a single word about the content and character of Baberowski's project.

Bethke is no more interested in doing this than university authorities are, because such a discussion would bring the entire structure of lies crashing down. In contrast to the official propaganda, to which the federal government also recently lent its support, Baberowski is not a historian being prevented by students from practicing his research and scholarship. He is rather a right-wing ideologue who is being criticised for his extremist views and projects.

The orientation of Baberowski's "Interdisciplinary centre for comparative research of dictatorships" was so unscientific and

motivated by such a right-wing political agenda that it was torn to shreds by his academic colleagues in two out of four project evaluations. Baberowski explicitly declared dictatorships to be legitimate and even popular alternatives to democratic forms of rule in his application, and added that he wanted to investigate them "free from prejudice."

He described dictatorships as "orders that are not only based on a lack of freedom, violence, and repression," but also "representing configurations of the politically possible that must be understood." In modern times, they have always been an alternative "which became attractive under certain conditions."

Baberowski's motion goes on, "In some countries, citizens were able to profit mentally or materially from them, because open societies cannot afford under precarious conditions what dictatorships can achieve under other circumstances." Significantly, Baberowski explicitly conceived of the centre as a "think tank" that would pursue the goal of "making offers to politicians that could be used in the day-to-day decision-making process."

Bethke and the F.A.Z. are outraged because students made the plans for a research centre on dictatorships public, and because Baberowski is now widely known for what he is: a right-wing extremist ideologist.

"He has not only been denounced on the 'World Socialist Web Site', which claims he wants to expel critical students from the university and silence them, as a 'right-wing extremist professor', a 'Nazi apologist', and a 'historical revisionist'," writes Bethke. Baberowski is also being "attacked" above all "for his 'anti-communism' and criticism of Merkel's refugee policy."

Bethke desperately seeks to discredit the criticisms made of Baberowski. "A thorough engagement with his research" is "rarely found in these demonisations of him." By contrast, one finds "torrents of blanket condemnations and malice" on social media, and one searches "in vain for arguments or the strength to tolerate political differences."

One doesn't know whether to laugh or cry. If there is a party lacking in "arguments" or the "strength to tolerate political differences," it is Baberowski and his defenders in the media and the political establishment. Bethke's comment—a witch's

brew of flat-out lies, absurd statements and malicious slanders—provides ample evidence of this, as does Baberowski's own thin-skinned, aggressive public appearances.

The right-wing extremist professor brings lawsuits against student groups that criticise him, denounces political critics variously as “left-wing violent criminals,” “malicious psychopaths,” “repulsive denunciators” or “mentally ill,” and incites on social media his right-wing extremist supporters—including members of the Young Alternative, the youth movement of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), and the neo-Nazi Identitarian Movement.

To give just one example, Baberowski posted an image on Facebook in January of a post by the IYSSE group at Humboldt University, which critically engaged with his plans for a research centre on dictatorships. Above it, he wrote, “At Humboldt University, Stalinists are allowed to do as they please, and nobody stops them. Who will shut these criminals down?” He added on Twitter, “These crazies actually belong on a closed psychiatric ward!”

The claim that a “thorough engagement” with Baberowski's “research” and political views is not taking place is a bare-faced lie. The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, have intensively combatted Baberowski's theoretical and political conceptions. The two books alone that have been published by Mehring Verlag on this topic—*Scholarship or War Propaganda?* and *Why Are They Back?*—comprise more than 400 pages. The essay “Jörg Baberowski's historical falsification” by Christoph Vandreier is a detailed examination of Baberowski's career, the reactionary theories of history and violence he advances and the relativisation of the Nazis' crimes that runs like a red thread through his writings.

One can now read in a best-selling book that Baberowski's historical revisionism goes hand-in-hand with the right-wing extremist agenda he is pursuing politically. The recently published book by *Die Zeit* authors Christian Fuchs and Paul Middelhof, titled *The Networks of the New Right*, lists Baberowski as the initiator of a right-wing extremist “salon,” which not only includes the racist Social Democrat Thilo Sarrazin, but also far-right publicists like Dieter Stein (*Junge Freiheit*), Karlheinz Weißmann (*Cato*), and Frank Böckelmann (*Tumult*). “The circle around Baberowski and his collaborators” also produced “the idea for ‘Joint Statement 2018,’” which “railed against so-called mass illegal immigration” and demanded “strong authoritarian leadership in Germany.”

Bethke is undoubtedly familiar with all of this. The correspondent, born in 1980, was already publishing articles in the F.A.Z. when the then head of its cultural section and current co-editor Jürgen Kaube slandered the SGP's criticism of Baberowski as “defamatory.” This was in spite of the fact that Baberowski stood up for the late historian and Nazi apologist

Ernst Nolte in a February 2014 edition of *Der Spiegel*, and trivialised Hitler's role by remarking, “He was not vicious. He did not want to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table.”

In a statement responding to Kaube's article, “Trotskyist bullying,” the SGP raised the questions, “Why does nobody criticise Baberowski's outrageous statements, and why does he enjoy support from people in high places? What has brought about this change?”

And we explained, “In our opinion, it has to do with the new orientation of German foreign policy. The ‘end of military restraint’ requires a new, reactionary interpretation of history. Opinions that were long discredited and rejected now find agreement and are declared to be beyond criticism. Anyone criticising them is accused of ‘defamation’.”

This connection has been made clear in an especially repugnant manner in the F.A.Z. ever since. The mouthpiece of the Frankfurt stock exchange has not only opened its pages frequently to Baberowski over recent years, but also to AfD leader Alexander Gauland, who glorifies the Wehrmacht and describes Hitler and Nazi rule as “bird poop in over a thousand years of successful German history.”

Bethke's article is part of this campaign. Significantly, the F.A.Z. weekly magazine appeared just a day later with the title “Lagging power: how Germany struggles with its role in the world.” The title page shows a picture of the notorious German steel helmet on a tortoise. The message is unmistakable: the massive rearmament of the German army and Germany's return to an aggressive and militarist imperialist foreign policy are progressing too slowly, notwithstanding “significant professions.”

Following its historic crimes in two world wars, the German ruling class knows full well that it can only impose its new plans for war in the face of mass opposition by relying on authoritarian forms of rule based on fascist forces. This is the real reason for the F.A.Z.'s defence of Baberowski and for Bethke's anger toward the students for blocking his project for a research centre on dictatorships.



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