

German Education Minister Karliczek supports right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski

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The Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), which is aligned with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the largest party in the German federal government, organised a symposium on 12 February titled “Freedom of scholarship: The claim and reality of a core value.”

On the platform alongside Education Minister Anja Karliczek, former German Parliament President Norbert Lammert and the president of the Association of University Lecturers, Bernhard Kempen, sat the right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski. Their joint appearance is documented on the official website of KAS.

Baberowski provided a revealing demonstration just days earlier of what he understands by “freedom of speech.” He tore down election placards of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) from a blackboard on the campus of Humboldt University and destroyed them. When he realised that Sven Wurm, the spokesperson for the IYSSE at the university, was filming his actions, Baberowski lashed out at him and threatened him with the remark, “Should I smack you in the face?” The incident was captured on video.

Nobody at the KAS event was bothered by Baberowski’s attacks on student critics. Like the Social Democratic president of Humboldt University, Sabine Kunst, the German government backs the right-wing extremist professor. Karliczek previously declared her support for Baberowski in an official statement released in 2019.

“The recent incidents and disruptions of teaching and scholarly activities at some universities are warning signs. Scholars and university students should be permitted to be, in fact must be, challenging and able to consider controversial topics publicly,” stated Karliczek in her introductory speech.

The president of the German Association of University Professors and Lecturers, Bernhard Kempen, who is also a notorious defender of Baberowski, made clear in the ensuing debate the type of “challenging” professors Karliczek had in

mind.

The official report on the meeting stated, “The incidents involving controversial scholars like Jörg Baberowski, Berndt Lucke and Herfried Münkler, which led to protests at the universities, “represent a spectral shift in the spectrum of scholarly debate,” Kempen said, describing this development as “dangerous.”

Kempen spoke in favour “of the universities taking a clear stand.” They ought “not to be misunderstood as a protective zone where every self-defined group can determine what is or is not unsayable in scholarship.”

The “scholarly” opinions that Kempen believes should not be criticised by students are, in fact, right-wing extremist positions that were long considered “unsayable” at German universities. And for good reason. Following the Nazis’ crimes and the two world wars, which were launched from German soil, it was considered unacceptable to trivialise Hitler and the Third Reich and advance right-wing extremist and militarist positions.

But this consensus ended long ago. The media and politicians laud right-wing extremists, militarists and Alternative for Germany (AfD) party members as honourable “scholars” and denounce criticism of them as attacks on “freedom of scholarship.”

Baberowski, who heads the department for Eastern European history at Humboldt University, is the most well known Nazi apologist among German historians, following the death of Ernst Nolte. He told *Der Spiegel* in 2014: „Hitler was not a psychopath, and he wasn’t vicious. He didn’t want to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table.”

In January of this year, he told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that Hitler “did not want to know anything about Auschwitz,” one of the main lies promoted by Holocaust deniers. Baberowski’s “scholarly” works are characterised by a trivialisation of the Nazis and the Third Reich’s crimes.

Münkler, now a professor emeritus, is one of the leading

war-mongers and great power strategists of German imperialism. In his 2015 essay “Power in the Centre,” he demanded that Germany take on the role of Europe’s hegemon by emerging as a “taskmaster,” rather than remaining a “paymaster.” In interviews and speeches, he has appealed for the purchase and use of armed drones, described poison gas as a “humane” weapon, and complained that in a “post-heroic society” people are no longer willing to sacrifice their lives for economic and geostrategic interests.

Lucke, who was the target of protests at Hamburg University, is the founder of the AfD, whose honorary chairman, Alexander Gauland, glorifies the Wehrmacht and describes the Nazi regime as “bird shit in over 1,000 years of successful German history.”

The AfD’s leader in Thuringia, Björn Höcke, with whom Lucke celebrated at an election party when he was AfD leader, is a fascist. He warned in a book against an “imminent death of the people due to population replacement” and advocated the forcible deportation of “culturally foreign” people from Germany by means of a “large-scale re-emigration project.”

Lucke also advocates racist views and has denounced refugees as “the dregs of society,” among other things. This did not stop the Social Democratic/Green Hamburg state government from forcing through Lucke’s return to the university by deploying the police in opposition to student resistance.

The German government’s full-throated defence of Baberowski and the aggressive defence of AfD professors like Lucke must be taken as a warning. Under conditions of the deepest capitalist crisis since the 1930s, mounting conflicts between the major powers, and the preparation of new wars, the ruling elite is not only aligning itself with right-wing extremist forces, it is also embracing their methods.

Baberowski’s attack on Wurm provides a foretaste of the type of regime the ruling elite is seeking to establish in Germany, 75 years after the collapse of the Third Reich, in order to impose its agenda of militarism, the strengthening of the repressive state apparatus, and the enforcement of attacks on public services and workers’ living standards.

While Baberowski’s vulgar threats and physical attacks on students are apparently protected by “scholarly freedom,” the criticism of his right-wing positions are not. The reason for this is not hard to fathom. The right-wing professor’s positions are shared by the government. The decision by the Social Democrats, the CDU and the Christian Social Union to continue the grand coalition after the 2017 federal elections made the AfD the leading opposition party in the German parliament. Ever since, they have integrated the

right-wing extremists into parliamentary affairs and adopted their agitation and policies.

The grand coalition’s weaponry includes the trivialisation of the Nazis and a struggle against the left. Significantly, Baberowski will play an important role this year at official ceremonies commemorating the end of World War II. The right-wing extremist ideologue is to speak at an event organised by the Association of Memorials in Saxony on 4 May alongside the parliamentary state secretary in the Defence Ministry, Peter Tauber.

In the latest report by the Verfassungsschutz (the domestic intelligence agency), the grand coalition government includes the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP—Socialist Equality Party) for the second time in a row as an “object of surveillance,” because, according to the Interior Ministry’s accusation, it advocates a socialist programme “against the existing state and social order, which it slanders universally as capitalist, against the EU, against alleged nationalism, and against militarism and imperialism.”

The SGP filed a lawsuit against the Verfassungsschutz in 2019 and in its statement “Stop the right-wing conspiracy! Defend the SGP against the Verfassungsschutz!” it warned: “With its attack on the SGP, this criminal state agency wants to set a precedent for the creation of an explicitly political and ideological justice system that will pursue anyone who criticises reactionary social and political trends. Striking workers will be targeted, along with booksellers who offer Marxist literature, or critical artists, journalists and intellectuals.”

Baberowski’s attacks on left-wing students and the government’s support for him underscore just how advanced this process is. It is high time to take action. We call upon everyone who defends democratic rights and wants to oppose the revival of fascism and militarism to contact us today and join the struggle for a socialist counter-offensive.



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