

Leipzig University resorts to authoritarian methods to push through meeting with far-right Professor Jörg Baberowski

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Rarely has there been such a coincidence of form and content as was the case at the meeting “Why is there no Peace?” with Jörg Baberowski at the University of Leipzig on October 22. The right-wing extremist professor presented his completely unfounded theses for an authoritarian police state and brutal wars to empty ranks after the organisers of the event excluded any public participation. Fearful of criticism, following a storm of protest from the student body, the university leadership responded in a thoroughly authoritarian manner.

In the run-up to the event, the Student Council (StuRa) of the University of Leipzig unanimously supported a motion put forward by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) opposing Baberowski’s appearance and calling on the university management to withdraw its invitation to the right-wing extremist professor. The motion described Baberowski “as a right-wing extremist ideologist who is known for trivialising the Nazis’ crimes, waging a foul campaign against refugees and promoting violence against political opponents.”

The university leadership, however, refused to withdraw its invitation to the far-right ideologist and instead excluded all those critical of his views. Just two days before the meeting, the university justified its stance with reference to rising coronavirus casualties. In fact, the “yellow” warning light for rising coronavirus cases was only issued on the day of the meeting and despite this, other meetings still took place in the same room of the University Church.

In any event, it would have been entirely possible for the university to broadcast the event online without any problems and, in so doing, allow critical opinions to be raised. However, even when the video of the meeting was finally placed online on YouTube, the university theological faculty blocked the comments area of the platform.

This censoring of any criticism at a university meeting is not only shameful, it is a fundamental attack on the democratic rights of students—the response of an authoritarian university leadership who expect students to intellectually ingest anything put in front of them.

Baberowski’s appearance in the University Church was

reactionary and despicable in every respect. The notorious professor, who has personally physically attacked leftist students and called for the disruption of their meetings, was given a stage to parade his crude theses on the necessity of a police state and brutal wars, backed up with absurd examples.

At the heart of Baberowski’s “theory of violence” is the completely unfounded notion that violence is an ahistorical basic condition of mankind, which is invulnerable to civilisation, enlightenment or social development. Democracy is therefore as impossible as social equality. On this basis, wars are inevitable and must be waged with the most brutal methods in order to win.

In Leipzig, Baberowski declared that “all social conditions pertaining to people ... are permeated by power.” According to the professor, people only abide by traffic regulations and other laws because they fear violence. At the same time, the vast majority of people are not interested in freedom, but rather security. “Freedom is much less important than the security afforded by order,” the professor claimed.

This was then followed by remarks already well known from Baberowski’s books and texts, which serve solely to justify violence and dictatorship. “For centuries people have maimed and killed one another and nothing will stop them from doing so in future. We are capable of injuring others and can be injured ourselves. Because that is so, we must protect ourselves from one another. Through conventions and rules, but also with weapons to enforce their recognition at any time,” the far-right professor intoned.

Nobody, therefore, should seek to question the balance of power, because: “Unfortunately, there is no peace without a clear balance of power. Once the balance between obedience and security is shaken, then peace is quickly over,” Baberowski declared. “Only those who are able to follow up threats with action can prevent others from becoming violent.

These antidemocratic and anti-Enlightenment ideas are part and parcel of the intellectual armoury of the far right. Because man is violent and incapable of development, he must be kept in check and suppressed by a strict regime. Dictatorship thus becomes a necessary guarantor of security, the militarily

equipped state for self-protection in the struggle for existence, with blatant social inequality the natural order of things.

Baberowski did not stop at such generalities. Already in September 2015, on the TV program *Kulturzeit*, he declared aggression against refugees to be a natural response and, following a spate of arson attacks on refugee homes, he declared, “Given the problems we currently have in Germany with immigration, which is happening now, I think what we are seeing is relatively harmless.”

With regard to international terrorism, he told the right-wing conservative *Cicero* magazine in January 2016 that there is no way to combat it other than through wars. “Terror can only be countered by violent means,” Baberowski said. He had already explained in detail elsewhere what methods were necessary to defeat the terrorists. During a discussion entitled “Intervention Power Germany?” at the German Historical Museum on October 1, 2014, he said: “And if one is not willing to take hostages, burn villages, hang people and spread fear and terror, as the terrorists do, if one is not prepared to do such things, then one can never win such a conflict and it is better to keep out altogether.”

Baberowski not only calls for new savage wars, he justifies the atrocities of the Nazis. Baberowski portrays the greatest and most heinous crimes in human history, culminating in the industrial extermination of 6 million Jews, as the result of the actions of the Red Army, which defended the Soviet Union against invasion by the German Wehrmacht.

“Stalin and his generals forced on the Wehrmacht a new kind of war that no longer spared the civilian population,” he wrote in 2007, and developed similar positions in his book “Scorched Earth” published in 2012. Such apologetics for the Nazis culminated in his assertion in *Der Spiegel* in early 2014 that Hitler was “not vicious” because he did not want to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his dinner table.

The organisers and those in attendance in Leipzig were well aware of Baberowski’s far-right positions and invited him precisely for this reason. FAZ correspondent Reinhard Bingener, who moderated the event, explained in his introduction that Baberowski had aligned himself with the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte, who unleashed the “Historian’s Dispute” of the 1980s. Unabashed, Bingener described Baberowski’s apologetics on behalf of the Nazis as “acts of political remembrance,” and his playing down of violence against immigrants as “criticism of the federal government’s refugee policy.”

Professor Rochus Leonhardt from the theological faculty of the University of Leipzig expressed his “appreciation for the basic thesis advocated by Mr. Baberowski from a Protestant-theological point of view, and that in a thoroughly affirmative sense.” Because the majority will always remain un-Christian, it was impossible, in the terms of Luther, to create a completely emancipatory society, the theologian said. He was convinced of this up until now and had now felt confirmed by Baberowski.

The vice-chairman of the Church Office of the Evangelical Church Germany, Horst Gorski, gave his final imprimatur to the meeting. Although mildly critical of Baberowski’s notions of violence and his aggressive tone, Gorski did not mention his apologetics for Nazi crimes, his defence of dictatorship, or his trivialisation of xenophobic attacks.

The significance of this unanimity on the part of the organisers, church, and university leadership extends far beyond the walls of Leipzig University. Against the will of a great majority of students, they have pressed ahead with a meeting, which propounded an extreme right-wing portrait of mankind and promoted war and dictatorship—at the same time excluding any critical discussion. This is intended to bolster the standing of a professor whose playing down of Nazi crimes and xenophobic incitement against foreigners at universities has provoked huge protests throughout Germany. Most recently, international student representative bodies have expressed their opposition to Baberowski’s physical abuse of students critical of his opinions.

The IYSSE had already situated Baberowski’s defence by politicians, media and professors in political context in 2014, following his attempt to rehabilitate Hitler. In an open letter to the university leadership protesting against this position, the youth and student organisation of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) declared:

“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.”

Six years on, the German ruling class’s turn to militarism, fascism and dictatorship is well advanced. While the federal government is implementing the largest armaments program since the end of World War II and literally walking over dead bodies by keeping open schools and businesses in the coronavirus pandemic to secure the profits of the big banks and corporations, the universities are being transformed into centres of militaristic and reactionary ideology against the expressed will of the students.



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