

Right-wing German newspaper agitates against Berlin student

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For an entire week, Germany's right-wing Springer media empire has been waging a filthy witch-hunt against the Berlin-based student Bengt R. The 21-year-old, who studies law at Humboldt University and is politically active in the Social Democrats and its youth movement, the Jusos, came under vicious attack from right-wing media outlets, his own party, and Humboldt University management following a few ill-considered posts on Twitter.

He initially responded to a sexist post by a member of the Young Liberals, who described a picture of a shelf with cleaning products in a pharmacy as a "bar for women." In the course of a discussion that developed in response to the post, Bengt wrote in an obviously unserious manner, "Shooting Young Liberal when?"

The discussion was publicised by the right-wing extremist columnists Don Alphonso and Benedikt Brechtken and served up for the right-wing mob to feast on. Then on Saturday, February 6, the right-wing daily *Bild* headlined a piece posted prominently on its website, "The crazed murder fantasies of a Berlin Juso official."

It didn't take long for Berlin's tabloids to embrace the non-story. The B.Z. wrote of "violent fantasies," while the Berlin Kurier even asserted that he had "given free rein to his violent fantasies on social media and glorified attacks on political opponents."

None of this corresponded to reality. The claim that he glorified attacks was based on a tweet from the Juso member in which he wrote that he would be unable to "suppress clandestine joy" if Amazon founder Jeff Bezos fell victim to an attack. This was a satirical reference to a text published in 1977 by the student council in Göttingen in response to the assassination of the old Nazi and top state prosecutor Siegfried Buback. The student council condemned terrorist attacks while

expressing its "clandestine joy" at Buback's death.

R.'s tweets are tasteless and politically wrong-headed, but they are certainly not "crazed violent fantasies." The day after the posts on Twitter, R. apologised for his comments in a post on Facebook, categorically distanced himself from violence against political opponents, and stood down from his posts in the Social Democratic Party (SPD). He had realised that his statements could be understood as a call to commit acts of violence. "I firmly reject violence against people as a means of political conflict," he wrote.

But this did not prevent the *Bild* newspaper or the SPD from launching further attacks. On the afternoon of Sunday, February 7, the SPD's Berlin state leader, Franziska Giffey, thundered, "This behaviour is intolerable. We are horrified. Consequences must follow." She added that this had been communicated to the Jusos executive. Tom Schreiber, who sits in the Berlin House of Deputies, said, "Someone like this does not belong in the SPD or the Jusos. The investigation itself cannot be neglected. The resignation from his posts is to be welcomed, but this is only a first step."

The highpoint of the witch-hunt to date then came on Monday, February 8. Not only did almost every newspaper kiosk in Berlin carry headlines about "crazed murderous fantasies," but an unauthorised picture of the Jusos member was also published.

One feels compelled to recall the witch-hunting of Rudi Dutschke, which was whipped up by the Springer newspapers over the course of a year. Their demand from February 1968, "Stop the terror of the young reds now!" and their call "not to leave all the dirty work to the police and their water cannons," was answered several weeks later by the right-wing extremist Josef

Bachmann, who drew a pistol and fired at Dutschke three times. He survived with serious injuries but died several years later as a result of the attack.

A particularly filthy role in the personal attacks on R. is being played by Humboldt University. Simultaneously with the publication of the article by *Bild*, the case was taken up by the right-wing extremist historian Jörg Baberowski on his Facebook page. Previous statements made by him there against left-wing students resulted on several occasions in direct attacks on left-wing students, organisations or events, such as the witch-hunting of two student representatives, or the physical attacks on an IYSSE meeting at Humboldt University in December 2018.

Responding to a comment by a right-wing reader that it is necessary to exclude Bengt from the university's bodies, Baberowski stated that Bengt is "only one of four left-wing extremist agitators who sit on HU representative bodies. So it's not easy to remove these fascists from their posts."

Baberowski is referring here to the five student representatives on the HU's academic senate. This body considered two years ago Baberowski's application to establish a centre for comparative research on dictatorships and ultimately rejected it. Two students publicly criticised the initiative and were aggressively insulted by Baberowski. He now describes all student representatives as "left-wing agitators" and "fascists."

University management also immediately joined in the right-wing witch-hunt. It released a statement on Sunday, February 7, declaring that it condemned "in the strongest terms verbal insults, statements of defamation, and comments or tweets that call for violence. Hate speech has no place at HU and is unacceptable to us under any circumstances."

Such a statement from HU management can at best be described as disgracefully hypocritical. In 2018, HU management sued the student council on behalf of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) after the council refused to publish the names of its active students. Then, in January last year, Baberowski physically attacked the author of these lines, knocked the phone out of his hand, and threatened, "Should I smack you in the face?" I was in the process of filming the professor as he tore down student parliament election placards for the IYSSE from the noticeboards.

None of these incidents prompted HU management to defend their students against the professor's attacks. On the contrary, in the case of the physical attack, the management, led by Sabine Kunst, refused to issue any public statement and declared in the academic senate that Baberowski's attack was "humanly understandable." Official complaints filed over a year ago have gone without any response.

R. has received broad support on social media and among students. On Monday, February 8, the hashtag #SolidaritaetmitBengt (solidarity with Bengt) was trending on Twitter. The student representative bodies at the HU and Berlin's Technical University immediately published statements of solidarity.

The agitation against R., which has involved the entire right-wing media and leading politicians, is not merely targeted at a single student. It is aimed at silencing all criticism of the right-wing extremist cliques at HU and the right-wing policies of the grand coalition. The agitation coincided with the formation of the "Network for Academic Freedom," in which Baberowski and other right-wing extremist professors have come together to spread their right-wing positions and suppress their critics.

To impose the current policies of mass infection and unprecedented social inequality, a return to the methods of dictatorship and fascism is unavoidable. In this, HU in particular is playing a crucial role. The rejection of Baberowski's centre for dictatorship and the constant criticism of the HU's rightward lurch by student representative bodies and the IYSSE delivered powerful blows to this agenda. This is why they are resorting to the methods of witch-hunt and seeking to destroy the life of a young student.



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