

German court shuts down trial of right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski in exchange for payment of €4,000

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Two days prior to the scheduled beginning of the trial of the right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski for bodily injury and property damage, which had been scheduled for months, the Berlin District Court announced it was shutting down the proceedings. The decision included Baberowski's agreement to make a €4,000 payment to the non-profit organization KINDerLEBEN. Even though the payment by Baberowski amounts to an admission of guilt, the immediate consequence is a devastating political signal that declares violence against dissenting students by a right-wing extremist professor to be a trivial offence.

Baberowski, who teaches Eastern European history at Humboldt University in Berlin, destroyed large quantities of student campaign material from the International Youth and Students for Social Equality on January 30, 2020, physically attacked student Sven Wurm, and threatened him: "Should I punch you in the face?" The vandalism, the threat and the act of violence are documented on video and have never been called into question.

The prosecutor's office had already issued a penalty order for bodily injury and property damage in June last year on the basis of the clear facts, but Baberowski challenged this, resulting in the hearing being scheduled for April 27. The public prosecutor's office repeatedly refused to close the case, most recently in February of this year, because it was a clear case and a serious attack on the democratic rights of the student body.

Baberowski is a central figure within the far-right milieu. He spreads xenophobic hate speech, downplays violence against refugees and relativizes the crimes of the Nazis. In February 2014, he claimed in *Der Spiegel* that Hitler was not vicious and that the Holocaust was comparable to shootings during the Russian Civil War.

Baberowski has tried twice to silence his critics in court,

but he failed each time. The Cologne Regional Court found that his statements offered a sufficient basis to describe him as a "right-wing extremist," a "racist" and "glorifying violence." The District Court of Hamburg ruled that describing Baberowski's statements about Hitler as a "falsification of history" was permissible.

After his legal failures, Baberowski became increasingly aggressive towards dissidents. In 2020, two student senators denounced him for publicly defaming them as "left-wing radical fanatics" and "incredibly stupid" after they had made factual criticisms of his proposed "Center for Research on dictatorship."

When professors at Humboldt University criticized the head of the Lit publishing house for his support for the anti-refugee "Declaration 2018," Baberowski cursed them as "denunciators" and compared their behaviour to the Nazi boycott of Jews, saying he was reminded of "dark times." Baberowski wrote that his critics were saying, "Do not buy from the outcast!" Finally, he threatened them with the words: "The humiliated and excluded will remember who put them in the pillory."

Baberowski also repeatedly clashed with students from the university group of the IYSSE. He insulted them, among other things, as "dirty denunciators," "fascists" and "mentally ill people." His attacks culminated in the violent act in question. This was not a spur-of-the-moment action, but a systematic attack on his critics.

Baberowski tore down several IYSSE posters for the student parliament elections from a board for student notices. The video shows that when he is caught in the act, he slaps the mobile phone out of the hand of student parliament deputy Sven Wurm, who studies at Baberowski's history institute, and threatens him. This act of violence was aimed at intimidating students and preventing them from exercising their democratic right to

promote their political views.

The fact that this attack will not result in further punishment is not only a slap in the face for the victim, but an attack on all student critics who objectively criticize the right-wing radical positions of their professors. Violence against dissenting students by right-wing professors is in effect being declared a petty crime that is not worthy of criminal prosecution.

The fact that this is a political and not a legal decision is already evident from the decision by the public prosecutor's office to reject a halting of proceedings in February. The 180-degree turn only came a few days before the scheduled court date, and after Wurm had engaged a lawyer and requested to be considered a co-plaintiff on March 28 of this year.

Clearly, the prosecution wanted to avoid a process in which political issues were addressed. In response to a request from the WSWS, the Berlin Public Prosecutor's Office has not yet been able to provide any other reason for its decision.

There is no doubt that this about-face was due to political influence. The Social Democrat/Left Party/Green state government in Berlin, like the university administration, repeatedly backed the right-wing extremist professor.

Sabine Kunst (SPD), the longstanding president of Humboldt University, even described Baberowski's violent outburst against Wurm as "understandable in a human sense." An official complaint against Baberowski, which Wurm already filed on February 5, 2020, was simply ignored by Kunst.

Wurm then filed a complaint against Kunst with the then mayor of Berlin, Michael Müller, and the state secretary for education. In the explanatory statement, he referred not only to the support for Baberowski's violent act, but also to a long list of previous incidents in which Baberowski had threatened students and colleagues, and where Kunst had backed the right-wing extremist professor.

Wurm also mentioned that he had drawn the attention of the HU President to the fact that a close collaborator of Baberowski's was a neo-Nazi in his youth, known in Hanover, who, together with right-wing terrorists, participated in a demonstration against the Wehrmacht exhibition. "Kunst did not do anything to protect us students from such teachers," Wurm wrote, summing up:

"There is no harmless explanation for this clear chronology. Ms. Kunst systematically covered up Baberowski's repeated verbal and physical violence

against students and suppressed necessary criticism of the right-wing extremist professor. She is thus responsible for a climate of intimidation in which students are prevented from criticising the right-wing views of professors. This is incompatible with a democratic university."

The state government also refused to comment on the administrative complaint and forwarded it to Edelgard Bulmahn (Social Democratic Party, SPD), who chairs the HU Board of Trustees. Bulmahn brushed aside all accusations and blandly declared that "there is no official misconduct by the President of the HU." With regard to the unanswered supervisory complaint, she referred to the fact that the criminal proceedings against Baberowski were still ongoing and that it would therefore be inappropriate for the university to handle a supervisory complaint against Baberowski.

Despite Baberowski's fully documented crime, the SPD/Left Party/Green state government, together with university management, backed the right-wing extremist professor. This scandalous trivialisation of right-wing violence is now also reflected in the shutting down of the proceedings at the district court. The shift of the prosecutor's office must be seen against this background.

"We therefore call on all students to protest against this decision and to support the work of the IYSSE," explained Wurm. "The question is whether universities remain places of scholarship and democratic exchange or will they be transformed into right-wing centres and forges for a militaristic cadre. If right-wing violence is covered up and supported, there can be no more talk of a democratic university."



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