

Open Letter to the Presidium of Humboldt University in Berlin

# Stop right-wing violence against student criticism! Stop supporting the radical right-wing professor Baberowski!

Sven Wurm  
22 June 2022

*To the Presidium of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and the acting President of Humboldt University, Dr. Peter Frensch*

Dear Dr. Frensch,

As a member of the student parliament (StuPa) and on behalf of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) faction, I call upon you to finally end your support of the radical right-wing and criminal professor Jörg Baberowski and to initiate disciplinary proceedings against him. His assault on me, for which the district court has already ordered him to pay 4,000 euros, is completely unacceptable. If critical students must expect violence from professors during elections to the StuPa, there can be no question of a free election.

On the occasion of the presentation of a brochure about the role of Humboldt University in the preparation of [Hitler's] General Plan East and the implementation of the Nazi war of extermination, you rightly emphasized last week the "responsibility of academics and the university" to "position themselves credibly against anti-Semitism, against racism." In this context, you appealed to "ethical-moral standards" to ensure that research for criminal purposes "no longer happens."

But the behaviour of the Humboldt University (HU) presidium, of which you are acting head, has been directly opposed to these goals for years. It is responsible for a climate of violence and intimidation against students who oppose the return of militarism and right-wing extremism.

As early as February 5, 2020, I informed the HU

presidium that right-wing extremist Professor Jörg Baberowski had physically assaulted and vulgarly threatened me on campus. When I caught him removing and destroying legitimately displayed IYSSE election posters for the StuPa elections from a bulletin board, he knocked the phone out of my hand and threatened, "Do you want me to punch you in the face?" All of this is documented in a video that I provided to you.

The disciplinary complaint that I filed the same day has still not been resolved by you to date, although you are legally obligated to do so. Instead, your predecessor Sabine Kunst had even backed Baberowski at a meeting of the Academic Senate on February 11, 2020, defending his act of violence as "humanly understandable."

In the meantime, the public prosecutor's office had initiated criminal proceedings against Baberowski for bodily injury and damage to property, which were only discontinued by the court following payment of 4,000 euros. The fact that Baberowski paid this sum in order to avoid the oral proceedings must be seen as a clear admission of guilt.

But even this unambiguous outcome of the legal proceedings did not move the presidium to distance itself from its support for the right-wing radical professor. To this day, the HU presidium is covering up for a professor who had to pay 4,000 euros for physically assaulting a student in order to prevent him from exercising his democratic rights within the student representation!

The university administration is thus going against

the declared will of the vast majority of students. A resolution passed by the student parliament in June 2020 condemned the “serious and violent interference in this year’s elections” and called on the HU presidium to “end its support for the far-right professor and hold Baberowski accountable.”

Baberowski is the best-known academic on the far right. In 2015, he founded the “Salon Baberowski” (*Die Zeit*), where everything of note in the new-right scene is discussed at least every six months. He himself regularly agitates against refugees, beats the drum for brutal wars and, above all, trivializes the crimes of the Nazis.

In January 2020, Baberowski repeated to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* the central lie of many Holocaust deniers, that Hitler “wanted to know nothing about Auschwitz.” In doing so, Baberowski attempted to justify his earlier statement that Hitler had “not been cruel.” The trivialization of Nazi crimes runs like a thread through his academic work.

The fact that this right-wing extremist ideologue has now taken to roaming the campus himself as a far-right activist, destroying student election advertisements and physically attacking students, is also the responsibility of the HU presidium. For years, it has supported and defended the radical right-wing structures that have developed under Baberowski’s Chair of Eastern European History.

Even when I informed the presidium on February 12, 2017, that Mr. Baberowski had vulgarly insulted me in an official lecture and called on students to disrupt IYSSE events, it defended the radical right-wing professor and called “media attacks” on him “unacceptable.” Even when Baberowski moved to insult and threaten other Humboldt University professors for criticizing a right-wing petition, then-President Kunst backed him.

Then, in December 2018, about two dozen right-wing extremists responded to a call by Baberowski to disrupt an IYSSE event at Humboldt University. The [far-right] Alternative for Germany (AfD) officials present interrupted the speakers, threatened attendees, and attempted to sing the Deutschlandlied (national anthem). While the student parliament unanimously condemned this right-wing extremist attack on a student event at HU, Kunst again refused to take a stand against these machinations.

When Baberowski insulted two student representatives to the university senate, Bafta Sarbo and Juliane Ziegler, on his Facebook page as “inconceivably stupid” and as “left-wing extremist fanatics” because they had criticized a centre for dictatorship studies planned by him, Ms. Kunst unlawfully refused to decide upon a disciplinary complaint by the two students, let alone to take action against the abusive professor.

At the end of 2020, I informed the presidium that a close colleague of Baberowski’s had been a known neo-Nazi in Hanover in his youth, who, among other things, had taken part in a demonstration against the Wehrmacht exhibition [exposing the crimes of Hitler’s army] together with right-wing terrorists. The university’s press office answered me monosyllabically that it could not comment publicly on personnel matters. The presidium did not do the slightest thing to protect us students from such teachers.

There is no innocent explanation for this clear chronology. The presidium has systematically covered up Baberowski’s repeated verbal and physical violence against students and suppressed necessary criticism of the radical right-wing professor. It is thus responsible for a climate of intimidation in which students are prevented from criticizing the right-wing views of professors. This is not compatible with a democratic university.

The next elections for the student parliament will take place on July 12. Students must be guaranteed the right to campaign for their lists of candidates and put forward their positions without intimidation and threats. I therefore call on you to finally initiate disciplinary proceedings against Baberowski and to ensure that the elections proceed without disruption.

Yours sincerely,  
Sven Wurm



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