

The German Partei für Soziale Gleichheit answers the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung's defense of Jörg Baberowski

By the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit
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The culture section of the December 1 edition of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) features an article under the headline “Mobbing, Trotskyist style: A Berlin historian is defamed,” that attacks the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party).

The newspaper's editor for the humanities, Jürgen Kaube, accuses the PSG and its youth and student organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), of conducting a campaign of defamation against Jörg Baberowski, who holds the chair for East European History at Berlin's Humboldt University.

The article is full of disparaging remarks, distortions and errors. It reproduces the point of view of Baberowski, an acquaintance of the author from joint appearances. The PSG was not contacted prior to publication or asked to provide a statement, although professional journalistic standards would demand this.

The article names neither the PSG nor the *World Socialist Web Site*. It uses false, invented names. It does not quote a single word from the statements of the PSG and includes no link to them. It thereby seeks to make it difficult for readers to inform themselves independently.

The PSG and the IYSSE have demanded that the publishers of the FAZ, Werner D'Inka, Berthold Kohler, Günther Nonnenmacher and Holger Steltzner, provide them with the opportunity to present their point of view by publishing the following statement in the FAZ.

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Statement of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit on the article “Mobbing, Trotskyist style”

In the FAZ of December 1, under the headline “Mobbing, Trotskyist style,” Jürgen Kaube accuses the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG) of conducting a campaign of defamation against Jörg Baberowski, the chair of East European History at Humboldt University in Berlin.

The PSG is not “defaming” Baberowski. It has merely

brought to the attention of a wider public what Baberowski himself has said and written. If Baberowski has been defamed, then it is by his own words. However, Kaube withholds these words from the readers of the FAZ. He does not cite a single statement by Baberowski that the PSG has publicly criticized. Here are some of the most important ones:

In February, in *Der Spiegel* (No. 7/2014), Baberowski made a plea for Ernst Nolte. He said: “Nolte was done an injustice. Historically speaking, he was right.”

Anyone who is familiar with the intellectual life of Germany during the last three decades cannot mistake the meaning of these words. With his justification of Nazi crimes in 1986, Nolte triggered the bitter Historians' Dispute (*Historikerstreit*). Since then, he has moved into the orbit of neo-Nazi forces.

Roger Cohen, the columnist for the *New York Times*, described Nolte in 2000 as a “Hitler apologist” (*New York Times*, June 21, 2000). In the same year, the historian Heinrich August Winkler attested that Baberowski's publications “unfortunately [left] no doubt that he has increasingly become a partisan of the right-wing extremists” (*Die Welt*, July 1, 2000). Christian Democratic Union leader Angela Merkel refused to hand him the Konrad Adenauer prize. And the FAZ itself declined to publish his articles after 1994.

All this was, according to Baberowski, “an injustice.” He is striving to rehabilitate Nolte, although Nolte has never departed from his pro-Nazi views. Just recently, in the magazine *The European* (April, 2014), Nolte pleaded once again for breaking the taboo on favorable commentary about Hitler.

To rehabilitate a “Hitler apologist” means to rehabilitate Hitler himself. In *Der Spiegel*, Baberowski produces his own euphemistic description of the Nazi leader. He states: “Hitler was no psychopath, and he wasn't vicious. He didn't want people to talk about the extermination of the

Jews at his table.” If that is not a revisionist apology for Nazism, then what is?

Another of Baberowski’s statements criticized by the PSG was made on October 1 of this year on the occasion of the Schlüterhof talks at the German Historical Museum. Commenting on the fight against the Taliban and ISIS, Baberowski 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.”

That is a fairly good description of what the Nazis called a “war of extermination.” For using such methods in breach of international law, the Nazi war criminals were condemned to death in Nuremberg in 1946.

If, as Baberowski claims, an injustice was done to Nolte, then all those who have criticized Nolte are guilty of “defamation.” Accusing their critics of defamation has always been the stock-in-trade of the extreme right, including the Holocaust denier David Irving. What is new is the high-level support they are receiving.

The Department of History at Humboldt University has backed Baberowski with a public statement. It places “teachers and students of Humboldt University” under pressure “to oppose the campaign against Professor Baberowski.” It even makes the absurd claim that our criticism of his right-wing statements violates “constitutionally protected academic freedom.”

If one accepts this view, academic freedom protects the defense of Hitler and the advocacy of war crimes, while criticism of these reactionary positions is defamatory. Actually, the issue is not academic freedom, but *Gleichschaltung* (state-mandated intellectual conformism). If a public debate on these issues is not permissible, then nothing can be discussed anymore. If criticism of such statements is defamation, then there is no freedom of speech.

In the FAZ, Jürgen Kaube supports the scandalous statement of the Department of History. He also defends an earlier attempt by Baberowski to suppress political and scientific criticism.

Baberowski invited the British historian Robert Service to speak at a public colloquium last February. Service’s biography of Trotsky had been discredited as a “piece of hack work” by international experts, who cited hundreds of mistakes and falsifications. Stanford Professor Bertrand Patenaude published a devastating critique in the prestigious *American Historical Review* (June 2011), and fourteen well-known German-speaking historians protested the publication of the book in a letter to Suhrkamp Verlag. These statements vindicated the comprehensive exposure of

Service’s book by David North, the chairman of the editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

When the PSG announced that it would pose critical questions to Service at the colloquium concerning his biography of Trotsky, Baberowski responded by moving the event to a secret location, publicly spreading the lie that it was not taking place, and then denying access to all those he suspected might ask critical questions.

Kaube justifies this outrageous act of censorship. Although he admits that the PSG had presented its questions to Service in writing beforehand, i.e., that it was looking for a serious debate, he considers it perfectly fine that Baberowski used security staff to exclude all participants “who found that Service’s book would better not be published.” Those who were locked out included not only David North, the only person Kaube mentions by name, but also a University of Potsdam professor who had signed the letter to Suhrkamp Verlag, as well as several students from Humboldt University.

The question is posed: Why does no one oppose Baberowski’s outrageous statements, and why does he find high-level support? What has led to this change?

In our view, this is connected to the ongoing reorientation of German foreign policy. The “end of military restraint” requires a new, reactionary narrative of history. Views that were long discredited and rejected now find support and are beyond any criticism. Whoever attacks them is accused of “defamation.”

Anyone who carefully reads the statement by the Department of History at Humboldt University and the article by Jürgen Kaube can have no doubt that at stake is the future of not only Humboldt University, but academic life in Germany as a whole. Will universities remain centers of science and free discussion? Or will they again—as before in German history—become state-controlled hothouses for right-wing, neo-Nazi and militarist ideology?

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To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>