

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung editor defends his attack on the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit

By Johannes Stern
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In a panel discussion at the Deutsche Theater in Berlin, the future co-publisher of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), Jürgen Kaube, defended his attack on the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party of Germany). He also said the FAZ would not publish the PSG’s response to his article.

On December 1, Kaube wrote a slanderous commentary in the FAZ attacking the PSG. The article was entitled “Mobbing trotzkistisch: Ein Berliner Historiker wird deffamiert“ (Mobbing, Trotskyist-style: A Berlin historian is defamed). In a letter to the publishers of the FAZ, the PSG demanded that the newspaper print a response by the PSG. The FAZ has neither responded to the letter nor answered the PSG’s telephone calls.

Last Friday, however, the opportunity arose to question Kaube personally in a forum at the Deutsche Theater, where he had actually been chosen to speak as an expert on the “culture of discussion” in the academic world.

When a member of the PSG brought up Kaube’s article and the PSG’s response in the public discussion, he demonstrated what the FAZ means by a “culture of discussion.” He again tried to present the PSG’s criticism of the views expressed publicly by historian Jörg Baberowski as “defamation.”

Kaube said: “You know, it’s a technique when one says that someone, a professor, defends Ernst Nolte. You know very well that the quote to which you refer means the Ernst Nolte of the historians’ dispute [i.e., the famous *Historikerstreit* of 1986], not the Ernst Nolte who was published in the *European* or something. I don’t know if you were even born, it was

25 years ago.”

In fact, the Ernst Nolte of today is the same Nolte who provoked the historians’ dispute. For many years, Nolte has made public statements that “unfortunately, leave no doubt that he has increasingly become a partisan of the radical right wing” (as historian Heinrich August Winkler noted), and that earned him the accusation of being a “Hitler apologist” (from Roger Cohen in the *New York Times*). Nolte’s opponents in the 1986 historians’ dispute were right to accuse him of portraying Nazism as an understandable reaction to Bolshevism, and thus providing a justification of the Hitler regime and its crimes. Nolte’s subsequent evolution has confirmed this.

Baberowski is an avowed supporter of Nolte. In the same *Der Spiegel* article in which Baberowski declared, “Nolte was done an injustice. Historically speaking, he was right,” Nolte himself was quoted extensively making extreme-right comments. According to *Der Spiegel*, Baberowski said he “was the only student to defend Nolte’s theories in an advanced seminar.”

Nolte’s standard argument—that Bolshevism was the original evil, and Nazism merely an understandable reaction to it—runs like a red thread through Baberowski’s work. Based on this thesis, he plays down the Wehrmacht’s (German Army’s) war of annihilation against the Soviet Union. According to Baberowski, this war, which was carefully planned and prepared by Hitler and his generals, was “forced” upon them. In a 2007 essay, he wrote, “Stalin and his generals forced the Wehrmacht into a new type of war, which no longer spared the civilian population.”

Like Nolte, Baberowski plays down Hitler’s role.

Der Spiegel quoted him as saying, “Hitler was a psychopath, and he wasn’t vicious. He didn’t want people to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table.”

To defend this scandalous remark, Kaube resorted to Nolte’s standard argument, declaring that Baberowski had been speaking only about Stalin. In the *Deutsche Theater*, Kaube said: “The context was, the question was, what were the differences between Hitler and Stalin? And here, Baberowski elaborated that Stalin himself had drawn up lists of victims, and had enjoyed it, and he said Hitler had not done that.” Baberowski’s words, Kaube added, were “just a quote.”

In his FAZ article, Kaube accused the PSG of using “quotes ripped out of context” to “defame” Baberowski. In reality, the PSG merely brought his reactionary agenda to a wider public.

Politically, Baberowski publicly promotes the methods of wars of annihilation that violate international law, and justifies them as a historian. On October 1, in a panel discussion at the German Historical Museum entitled “Interventionsmacht Deutschland?” (Germany as an intervention force?), where he discussed the wars against the Taliban and the Islamic State, 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.”

The PSG criticised these remarks. Baberowski was speaking not to warn against the terrible methods of imperialist wars of conquest, but as a cold-blooded advocate of *realpolitik*. His standpoint is that Germany should intervene militarily only when it is prepared to act more brutally than its opponents, and thus win the war.

At the same meeting, he declared: “Yes, of course, Germany should assume such a role and it is important that Germany accept responsibility, especially in such conflicts that affect it. But one should consider (a) what type of war one is prepared for, and (b) whether one can win.”

In the *Deutsche Theater* forum, the speakers on the panel sought quickly to suppress discussion of this topic. When a foreign visitor asked Kaube whether he saw a connection between the utterances of Baberowski and the campaign to revive German militarism, Kaube

was stumped: “I am stumped for an answer. I don’t understand these things which you have just mentioned. I am a sociologist.”

Christian Demand, the evening’s moderator and the publisher of the magazine *Merkur*, then banned further questions “on the topic of Baberowski.”

In its reply to the FAZ, the PSG posed the question, “Why does no one oppose Baberowski’s outrageous statements, and why does he find high-level support?” It explained: “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 criticism. Whoever attacks them is accused of ‘defamation.’”

The meeting at the *Deutsche Theater*, which paradoxically was entitled “Intellectual Inhibitions,” confirmed this estimation. None of the approximately sixty people present from the world of academia and journalism appeared disturbed by the fact that in a leading German university, and in the renowned FAZ newspaper, professors and journalists are working to rehabilitate Nolte and, with him, Hitler.

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