

What is behind the hysterical defence of Baberowski by the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung?

By Christoph Vandreier
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The verdict of the Cologne regional court that Humboldt University professor Jörg Baberowski can be described by the Bremen University Student Union (Asta) as a right-wing extremist has triggered hysterical reactions from his defenders. The conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) published a long article on Monday aimed at defaming and silencing his critics with shameless lies and gross slanders.

The FAZ claims that the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its youth organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), carried out a “character assassination” of a “popular” professor. The author, Heike Schmoll, indulges in crude conspiracy theories and tall tales about supposed “American financiers” who are inciting students at Humboldt University against Baberowski.

The fact that one of the largest bourgeois newspapers in Germany operates with lies that are so absurd and fabricated shows how concerned the ruling elites are about the growing opposition to their war policy. Therefore, Schmoll complains about the “effective” Trotskyist group that is fighting against the “transformation of universities into ideological centres of militarism” and which, with seven percent of the vote, received more support in the Humboldt University student parliament elections than the Association of Christian Democratic Students, the Greens and the Left Party.

The IYSSE has been able to extend its influence because it advances a socialist perspective against the growing threat of war. In January, the IYSSE stood a slate of candidates for the Student Parliament to “build a movement against militarism and war, social inequality and the rise of the right.” “We want to prevent Humboldt University again being transformed into a centre for right-wing and militarist ideologies as during the First and Second World War,” it said in its election manifesto.

With Trump’s election, a representative of the extreme

right has come to power in the US, and its policies will inevitably lead to war. The German elites are exploiting Trump’s election victory as an excuse “to promote their plans for a more independent foreign and military policy. What is planned, is a doubling of the military budget, more missions abroad and recruiting thousands of new soldiers,” the IYSSE has noted.

With her gutter journalism, Schmoll is trying to defame this criticism of the government’s war policy by recasting it as “character assassination.” In fact, the IYSSE campaign was never about a personal vendetta against individual professors at Humboldt University, but a fight against the return of German militarism.

In the ideological preparation for new wars and the transformation of the university, professors such as Baberowski and political scientist Herfried Münkler play an important role. This is what the IYSSE has shown in detail in leaflets, at public events and in the book *Scholarship or War Propaganda?* Münkler insists that Germany should become a “hegemon” and the “disciplinarian” of Europe in order to play a role in world politics. He favours the expansion of military interventions and the procurement of combat drones.

Baberowski goes even further. He has repeatedly argued for a harsh crackdown on terrorists. “Indifference is just another word for cowardice,” he wrote in the *Basler Zeitung*. “Those who understand no other language than violence, should also get to feel it.” At the beginning of 2016, he said in the politics magazine *Cicero*, “Terror can only be met with violent means.” The terrorists must themselves be made to feel terror.

Baberowski combines canvassing for war with foul nationalism and xenophobia. The integration of several million people into Germany disturbed “our traditional continuity, which provides social stability and consistency,” he said in September 2015 in the FAZ. His latest column in the *Basler Zeitung*, which glorified the nation state and its

borders, was hailed immediately by Björn Höcke, who stands on the far-right of the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Münkler and Baberowski are conscious that the return of militarism and nationalism in Germany will be met with overwhelming opposition, given the experiences of history. That is why they want to rewrite history to whitewash the crimes of German imperialism. In 2014, in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Münkler had already declared, “It is difficult to conduct a responsible policy in Europe if you have the idea: We have been to blame for everything. With regard to 1914, that is a legend.”

Baberowski has taken on the task of relativizing the crimes of the Nazis. In February 2014, he defended the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte in *Der Spiegel*, stating, “Nolte was done an injustice, historically speaking, he was right.” As proof of this statement, he said: “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.” He also likened shootings in Russia in 1918 with the Holocaust by saying, “Basically it was the same thing: industrial homicide.”

These apologies for the Nazis run like a thread through Baberowski’s work. In 2009, he wrote that the differences between Stalinism and Nazism had predominated “when you tell their pre-war history. And from a moral perspective, this comparison does not fall in favour of the Bolsheviks.” Baberowski continually presents the violence of the Wehrmacht (Hitler’s Army) against the civilian population on the Eastern Front as a result of the war conducted by the Red Army.

It is these monstrous historical lies that Schmoll so vehemently defends in the FAZ. She accuses the IYSSE of presuming “to decide on historical truth.” As if it were an open question that the Nazis planned the war of destruction! And as if it were a matter of debate whether Hitler was a cruel mass murderer!

With her incessant talk of “censorship” and the prevention of an “exchange of views” by the IYSSE, Schmoll wants nothing more than to suppress criticism of these right-wing positions. Anyone who criticizes the call for war and militarism is practicing censorship, in her view. Those who do not want to accept nationalism and xenophobia are seeking to prevent an exchange of opinions, according to this right-wing theologian. In fact, it is not a matter of defending freedom of expression, but rather of the freedom of the ruling elites from any criticism.

In the 1980s, the FAZ had already provided Ernst Nolte with a platform, and thus triggered the *Historikerstreit* (historians’ dispute). Now it is seeking to rehabilitate his reactionary theses and make extreme right-wing and militarist positions acceptable. It is in the FAZ that

Baberowski agitates against refugees and Münkler calls for combat drones. The paper is protecting them both against student criticism.

The reason is that the FAZ shares the views of the professors and is one of the driving forces of German militarism. Even the announcement of a massive increase in military spending does not go far enough for the newspaper.

Last November, FAZ co-publisher Berthold Kohler called for Germany to acquire nuclear weapons. On November 28, in response to Trump’s election, he called for “higher spending on defence, the revival of conscription, drawing red lines—and for German brains, utterly unthinkable, the question of one’s own nuclear deterrent capability.”

Such bellicose and reckless comments can be found almost daily in the FAZ, and they are now the official programme of the German government. While Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union) calls for a doubling of the military budget, Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (Social Democratic Party) demands the internal and external military capacity of the EU be stepped up. The deep crisis of capitalism is bringing back the ghosts of the past everywhere.

The level of lies and dishonesty in Schmoll’s commentary reveals how intense the social contradictions have become. While the ruling elites are determined to revive German militarism, workers and young people reject this madness. The ruling class has no other way of enforcing its policy than through lies and violence.

The inflammatory article in the FAZ must therefore be taken as a warning. The ruling class is willing to enforce its agenda against the population using any and all means. For their part, workers must prepare for this confrontation by building the SGP as the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

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