

Germany: Why is the taz newspaper defending the far-right ideologue Baberowski?

By Christoph Vandreier
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Earlier this month, the daily *taz* dedicated a three-page cover story in its weekend edition to the glorification of right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski. Now, Edith Kresta, who is responsible for travel, sports and science at the *taz*, has also spoken out in favour of overcoming “moral sectarianism” regarding right-wing extremist positions and against the stigmatization of xenophobic prejudices.

The embrace of Baberowski reveals the massive shift to the right of a whole social milieu and, at the same time, shows how correct and important is the fight against Baberowski being led by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Berlin’s Humboldt University.

The IYSSE responded to the first publication by *taz* with an open letter showing that the newspaper had employed open falsifications, distortions and dishonesty to whitewash Baberowski and defame his critics. The *taz* employed the persistent argument of the right-wing that criticism of them was an attack on freedom of expression and neglected to say what the real dispute at Humboldt University was about: the trivialization and justification of Nazi crimes.

The *taz* refused to print the letter from the IYSSE. The same applies to many other critical letters to the editorial board from throughout Germany. Instead, on March 15, Kresta published a wild commentary supporting the Baberowski article and advocating a political opening up towards far-right ideologies.

In absurd mental leaps, Kresta first attempts to portray the criticism of a right-wing extremist professor who attacks refugees and downplays Nazi crimes as a form of overly sensitive *political correctness* that places “morality before analysis” and is based on “tunnel vision.” She indirectly accuses those who criticise Baberowski of “moral sectarianism” and of presenting “simple truths.”

Kresta places criticism of right-wing extremist views on a plane with the absurd and often reactionary activities of representatives of identity politics. “Pictures are taken down, works of art are censored, poems are painted over. Prudery and radical blame are spreading,” she quotes another author, equating this with criticism of Baberowski’s right-wing extremist views. She praises the man who declared that Hitler was not vicious as a “smart, interesting scientist.”

Kresta is attracted by the stench of historical revisionism because she wants to give vent to her own anti-refugee sentiments. “If Alice Schwarzer, for example, speaks of ‘uprooted, brutalized and Islamized young men, mainly from Algeria and Morocco,’ after New Year’s Eve 2015/16 in Cologne that statement is not necessarily wrong,” she writes, “Why the outcry?”

While she lines up behind the mendacious media campaign about the New Year’s Eve events in Cologne and denounces entire groups of people, Kresta expressly does not want to stigmatize prejudice against

migrants but talk about it! She wants to “write about the problems that migration brings, as well as the difficulties of integration,” Kresta said. “We should argue about the depths of Islam without being immediately suspected of ‘Islamophobia’ or of racism.”

Ms. Kresta no longer wants to be deterred from spreading her right-wing views by “morality” or political correctness. She speaks for a whole milieu around the Greens and the Left Party, which over the last two decades has justified every war effort of the Bundeswehr (armed forces) and every social cut on the basis of supposed “humanitarianism” and now renounces this moral fig leaf.

The rightward shift of a social milieu

Both Kresta and Sabine Seifert, who wrote the original article on Baberowski, were born in the 1950s, politically socialized in the immediate aftermath of 1968, and came to *taz* in the late 1970s and early 1980s, respectively. Even then, it was the central organ of those sections of the 1968 movement that had gathered in the Greens and spoke for very well-off middle-class layers.

Like the party, the newspaper too moved quickly to the right. At the latest with the entry of the Greens into the federal government with the Social Democrats in 1998, the *taz* became a driving force of German militarism. It was at the forefront of justifying German wars against Serbia and Afghanistan by citing “human rights” and even the prevention of a “new Auschwitz.” Later, with regard to Libya, Syria and Ukraine, the *taz* attacked the German government from the right because it did not intervene aggressively enough.

Now it is pushing the logic of this policy towards ever more open forms of right-wing politics that do not even pay lip service to humanitarianism and human rights.

In the same issue in which the cover story about Baberowski was published, chief reporter Peter Unfried cheered on the Greens’ new conservatism in a commentary. He praised the Green Party state premier of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann, because a week earlier in the *taz* he had claimed the “conservative revolution” of the Christian Social Union (CSU) right-winger Alexander Dobrindt for himself.

Dobrindt had thundered against a supposed “supremacy of left-wing opinion,” referring to the concept of the “conservative revolution” coined by right-wing extremist Armin Mohler in the post-war era. Figures such as Carl Schmitt, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck or Ernst Jünger, who use this term, were characterized by an aggressive, often racist nationalism, the glorification of war and the justification of dictatorship. They exercised great influence on all the bourgeois parties of the Weimar Republic and paved the way ideologically for the Nazis to come to power.

This tradition is now being re-established. Kretschmann and Unfried refer positively to the concept. “If there is a conservative revolution, then

here with us,” said Kretschmann in the *taz*.

Three days after the Baberowski article, a long interview with the leader of the Left Party, Sahra Wagenknecht, appeared in the *taz*, in which she defended the decision of the Essen Tafel charity to give its food handouts only to “Germans” and counterposed the nation state as a bastion of “democratic sovereignty” and “social policy” to “international capital.” This puts her at the head of an anti-refugee campaign that blames the social catastrophe on the most vulnerable in society.

The Left Party and the Greens are joining ranks with the federal government, which is pursuing a right-wing policy of militarism and social cuts, employing the filthy agitation of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Family Minister Franziska Giffey (SPD) has stated that the AfD, unlike the other parties, articulates what people themselves experience every day. Health Minister Jens Spahn (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) mocks Hartz IV welfare recipients and Homeland Minister Horst Seehofer (CSU) has stated that Islam is not part of Germany.

The sharp turn to the right by the government and opposition finds its equivalent in newspapers and magazines. This is where author Uwe Tellkamp spreads his dull hatred against Muslims. The Suhrkamp publishing house is criticized for the alleged suppression of freedom of expression because it distances itself cautiously from this author.

A whole layer of politicians, opinion-makers, and affluent petty bourgeois are recalibrating their political compass in light of the return of German militarism and growing class tensions.

Seifert had already justified her defence of Baberowski with the fact that “in face of a morally consolidating New or Identitarian Right,” previous “political certainties, affiliations” were being dissolved. Kresta has now confirmed that.

Baberowski as a central figure of the New Right

Baberowski is a central figure of the New Right. In its current issue, political weekly *Die Zeit* reports that in 2015 he formed a network of right-wing and far-right figures, which meets regularly in Berlin and has now come out in public with a declaration of solidarity for anti-refugee demonstrations, the “Declaration 2018.”

The right-wing ideologues whom Baberowski has gathered around himself include the open racist Thilo Sarrazin (SPD); the spokesman for AfD parliamentary leader Alexander Gauland, Michael Klonovsky; the editor-in-chief of the far-right *Junge Freiheit*, Dieter Stein; and the Mohler student and co-founder of the New Right “Institute for State Policy,” Karlheinz Weißmann. The aim of the network is to make right-wing extremist positions acceptable again.

Baberowski is so central to the extreme right because he uses his prestige as a professor at Humboldt University to falsify history and downplay the Nazis’ crimes. This is a prerequisite for reviving xenophobic and right-wing thinking; to build on the right-wing traditions, historical experience must be eradicated.

In the *Neue Zürcher newspaper*, Baberowski complained that ever since 1968, “the resistance to a dead dictator [Adolf Hitler] is legitimacy enough to rise morally above other people. All other patronizing strategies follow the same pattern. Anyone who reaches conclusions about racism, colonialism, war and peace or gender relations different to what the hegemonic discourse allows is morally discredited.”

In order to make racism and war acceptable again, the arguments of moral superiority of Hitler’s opponents must be broken. And this is exactly what Baberowski has been working on systematically for years. Back in 2007, he claimed that the Nazi war of extermination had been a reaction to the Red Army’s warfare: “Stalin and his generals forced on the Wehrmacht [Nazi army] a new kind of war that no longer spared the civilian population.” [1]

This denial of the fact that the war of annihilation in the East was planned for a long time is not supported by any historical facts. It is a

crude falsification that is a slap in the face to any serious research. For example, in his most recent work on the Third Reich, the American historian Thomas Childers shows in detail how, in the war of extermination, Nazi ideology was combined with the war aims:

“A war of annihilation against Judeo-Bolshevism in the Soviet Union was the bedrock of Nazi ideology and a goal Hitler had obsessively embraced throughout his political career. It was the cause that defined and animated National Socialism; the confrontation between National Socialism and Communism was for him the main event, an epic clash of ideologies that would determine the fate of Germany, Europe, and the world. It would also vastly expand the scope and savagery of the war Hitler had unleashed, and with it, geopolitics and genocide would merge into one terrifying maelstrom, transforming the very nature of the war and bringing the merciless slaughter of millions.” [2]

Baberowski’s historiography is directed against this understanding. In 2014, in the newsweekly *Der Spiegel* he sought to rehabilitate the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte. “Nolte was done an injustice. Historically speaking, he was right,” said Baberowski and added as supposed proof: “Hitler was no psychopath, and he wasn’t vicious. He did not want people to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table.” Baberowski places the Holocaust on a par with alleged shootings during the Russian Civil War: “Basically, it was the same thing: industrial killing.”

This alone is a vile belittling of the Nazi killing machine, which spanned the entire continent and was planned down to the last industrial detail. And even if Baberowski denies it, the mass extermination of European Jews in the concentration camps was also planned at Hitler’s dining table.

On January 25, 1942, shortly after the Wannsee conference, Hitler told Heinrich Himmler over lunch, “If he [the Jew] is destroyed in the process, I cannot help. I see only one thing: absolute extermination if they do not go voluntarily. Why should I look at a Jew with different eyes than a Russian prisoner?” [3]

This conversation with Himmler is regarded as the starting signal for taking not only prisoners of war but also masses of Jews to the concentration camps. “Shortly after dinner, Himmler called Heydrich in Prague and put him in the picture. The note about this call in Himmler’s service calendar reads: ‘Jews to the CC.s.’ [Concentration Camps]”, writes Nikolaus Wachsmann in his comprehensive investigation of the concentration camps. [4]

The baseless falsification of history and belittlement of Nazi crimes by Baberowski met with no opposition within the academic and media world. While Nolte’s theses had provoked fierce criticism in the 1980s, the IYSSE, which criticized these views in pamphlets and at events, was massively attacked. The administration of the Humboldt University, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and representatives of all the official parties stood behind the trivialization of Hitler and defamed the IYSSE.

The IYSSE understood from the beginning what it was about. Immediately after the publication of the *Spiegel* article it declared, “The revival of German militarism requires a new interpretation of history that minimises the crimes of the Nazi era.”

The sharp shift to the right by large parts of the political establishment, which is expressed not least in the clear positioning of the *taz* in support of Baberowski, confirms this analysis. With the policies of war and social confrontation, all the evils of the past return. To make the Nazi filth acceptable again, history is rewritten.

However, the fight of the IYSSE at Humboldt University has not only brought to light how unanimously the media and professors are ready to accept and even defend this narrative. Above all, the tremendous response that the IYSSE has received shows that the vast majority of workers and students vehemently reject the right-wing project. The IYSSE and the Socialist Equality Party give this opposition a voice and a socialist

perspective.

Notes :

1. Jörg Baberowski, “Kriege in staatsfernen Räumen. Russland und die Sowjetunion 1905–1950”, in: D. Beyrau, M. Hochgeschwender, D. Langewiesche (Hrsg.), “Formen des Krieges. Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart”, Paderborn 2007, p. 305. (“Wars in remote areas. Russia and the Soviet Union 1905-1950”, in “Forms of War. From Antiquity to the Present.”)

2. Thomas Childers, *The Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, Simon and Schuster, 2017, p. 469.

3. Quoted from: Nikolaus Wachsmann, “KL—Die Geschichte der Nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager”, (CC—The history of the National Socialist Concentration Camps”) Munich 2016, p. 346.

4. Ibid.

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