

Upholding the Legitimacy of Israel's Invasion of Gaza: Charges of anti-Semitism used to Intimidate and Criminalise Opponents of War in Germany

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While millions of people are deeply shocked by the brutal bombardment of Gaza by the Israeli army, politicians and media commentators in Germany have attacked opponents of the war. Isolated anti-Jewish slogans have been highlighted in order to brand demonstrations as anti-Semitic and condemn them.

After thousands demonstrated around the world against the war last weekend, the Israeli army intensified its attacks on Gaza on Monday night. Press reports were of a night of terror, with non-stop bombardments and artillery fire.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned the population on television the previous evening to prepare for a lengthy military operation, which would not be halted until Hamas had been fully disarmed.

The brutal air, sea and land war against Gaza is an outrageous war crime. For three weeks, the Israeli army has been bombarding densely populated Palestinian residential areas with highly modern technology. On Tuesday, the number of Palestinian deaths rose to 1,110, with many children included among the victims. This is the official figure, and no one knows how many dead lie buried under the rubble. The number of those injured was given as 6,000, including many seriously injured.

The German government fears that the Israeli government's horrific crimes could provoke an anti-war movement not limited to criticising the Netanyahu government, but also directed against Berlin's support for Israel and the return of German militarism. Therefore, they are building up the threat of anti-Semitism to suppress all opposition to war.

Midway through last week, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote, "After days of anti-Semitic propaganda at demonstrations against Israel's military offensive, German President Joachim Gauck sent a strong signal." Gauck had called upon all Germans to demonstrate against anti-Semitism and not the Israeli government.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière (Christian Democrats) said that Israel had the right to defend itself, which should not be called into question "under any circumstances." State prosecutors, the police and the authorities had to take strong action against all forms of open or concealed anti-Semitism.

Justice Minister Heiko Maas (Social Democrats, SPD) declared that "anti-Jewish hate speech" was absolutely unacceptable and could not be justified by anything. Anti-Semitism could

never be tolerated again in Germany. Freedom of speech did not justify any hatred of peoples and certainly no violence. The justice minister commented that anti-Jewish slogans had to result in criminal charges. Anyone taking on Judaism in this way was also taking on Germany's constitutional order.

Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) also warned jointly with his colleagues from France and Italy against anti-Jewish slogans in Europe. Nothing, including the Gaza conflict, justified the demonisation of Jews.

A glance at Ukraine shows how dishonest this campaign is. There, the German government is cooperating closely with anti-Semitic and fascist organisations. Svoboda, a party that praises Hitler and the Nazi regime, was the most significant political force in the Maidan protests, which assisted in toppling Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovitch early this year.

Last year, the World Jewish Congress demanded the banning of Svoboda. But this did not prevent Steinmeier or representatives of the European Union (EU) and US from cooperating closely with the party's founder, Oleh Tyahnybok. On several occasions, Tyahnybok has noted his determination to destroy the "Russian-Jewish Mafia which controls Ukraine." When he took over the chairmanship of Svoboda 10 years ago, he said in a speech to supporters, "Grab your guns, fight the Russian swines, the Germans, the Jewish swines and other sub-humans."

Tyahnybok called John Demjanjuk, who was convicted for the murder of more than 30,000 mainly Jewish prisoners in the Sobibor concentration camp, a hero. His deputy, Yuri Michaltshisin, founded a think tank called the Josef Goebbels Political Research Centre.

Although all of these facts are known, important ministerial posts were reserved for Svoboda in exchange for it providing the shock troops for the coup in Ukraine. They are now playing a central role in the terrorisation of the population in eastern Ukraine.

When it serves German interests, the government does not have the slightest qualms about cooperating with anti-Semites and fascists. They are also doing so in Hungary, where the neo-fascist party Jobbik won 20 percent of the vote in April. Throughout Europe, right-wing parties are emerging as a direct response to the anti-social policies of the German government and EU.

The current campaign over anti-Semitism thus has absolutely nothing to do with genuine concerns about the potential threat to Jewish citizens. Rather, it is aimed at criminalising protests against war and imperialist crimes, restricting the right to assembly and intensifying police state measures.

In the same cynical manner in which the call "never again Auschwitz!" was used in the 1990s to justify the intervention of the German army outside NATO territory, the supposed struggle against anti-Semitism is a pretext for the abolition of democratic rights and the build-up of the state.

At some of the demonstrations in recent days, thousands of police in uniform and in civilian clothes were on duty. In Berlin last weekend, the ratio of police to demonstrators was one to one. Prior to the start of the demonstration, the police assumed the right to review the banners and placards and then to decide if slogans were permissible or not.

According to a report in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, a state prosecutor and a translator were at the latest demonstration in Stuttgart, along with a large police presence, in order to be able to intervene immediately and take judicial measures.

If the dishonest campaign over anti-Semitism is put to one side, it is obvious that the attacks by politicians and the media are directed against the anti-war nature of the demonstrations. At the beginning of the year, Gauck, Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen stated that the period of German military restraint was over, and that in the future Germany would once again intervene militarily in the world's crisis regions independently and with self-confidence.

The support for the governments in Kiev and Jerusalem shows what this means. The German government is preparing comparable war crimes and intends to suppress all opposition from the outset.

The return of German militarism is not only directed against targets abroad but also at home—i.e., it is linked to the abolition of democratic rights. Already a century ago, prior to the First World War, opponents of war were imprisoned. In preparation for the Second World War, democratic structures were completely destroyed and a fascist dictatorship was established.

A key role in the campaign of lies over anti-Semitism and attacks on demonstrators is being played by the Left Party.

Immediately after the beginning of the bombardment of Gaza, the Left Party's leading trio of Gregor Gysi, Katja Kipping and Berndt Riexinger warned of a one-sided critique. "The international community would be well advised not to falsely encourage either side with one-sided declarations of blame," they stated. This was "nothing other than encouraging a refusal to make peace. No one is conducting a just war in this war."

This call to abstain in a conflict between a heavily armed military and a virtually defenceless population, which has been starved, cut off from electricity and water, and bombarded continuously, signifies the toleration and support for war crimes.

The leader of the Left Party in Berlin, Klaus Lederer, went a step further last Friday. He demonstratively took part in a pro-Israel rally in Berlin. He claimed to decisively oppose the one-sided condemnation of Israel in the current conflict. The fact that calls to demonstrate against the current war made a one-sided condemnation of Israel resulted in all sorts of anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic organisations being drawn in, he declared. Regardless of what was said by the organisers, they were right-wing protests.

The support of the Left Party's leader in Berlin for Israel's war policy and reign of terror makes clear how right wing the Left Party is.

On Monday, the party's organ *Neues Deutschland* published an interview about the demonstrations with the Israeli political scientist Rafael Seligmann. It had the headline, "This is pure hatred and scurrilous."

The Left Party is using the current situation to signal its unconditional support for the government.

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