

German radicals defend Israeli state brutality in the West Bank-Part 1

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This is the first of a two-part article. The second part will be posted on Monday, December 11.

The WSWs has recently written on the German left radical magazine *konkret* (concrete), which in its October edition wrote on the issue of the sinking of the *Kursk* submarine and openly took the side of President Vladimir Putin and the Russian state [“The nationalistic reflex: left-wing newspapers in Germany exhibit unrestrained enthusiasm for Putin”].

Konkret began as an organ of the West German Communist Party and gained notoriety in post-war Germany when one of its editors, Ulrike Meinhof, ditched Stalinist politics in favour of the terrorist activities of the Red Army faction. Since 1974 the glossy monthly magazine, which has developed into a vehicle for many ex-Stalinist radicals, has been headed by Hermann L. Gremliza. In the October edition *konkret* contributor Ralf Schröder wrote an article in which he claimed that reports in the German press which commented on broad feelings of sympathy in Germany for the Russian victims of the *Kursk* tragedy were part of a conspiracy by the media together with the Russian mafia aimed at discrediting President Putin.

In the latest edition of the magazine Schröder has written a reply to the critique of the WSWs consisting of one-third of a page where he repeats a number of the points he made in his original article, but without taking up any of the criticisms made by Peter Schwarz, author of the WSWs piece. The nearest he gets to putting forward an argument in defence of his own article from October is when he states he was never in Russia!

Even more extraordinary than the lameness of Schröder's argumentation in the December edition is the way in which the magazine comes to the defence of the Israeli government in the current crisis in the

Middle East.

Konkret's virulent advocacy of Israeli interests in the present conflict in the Middle East began in the November edition of the magazine which bore the headline on its front cover “Israel: The Last Victim of the New World Order”. Inside, the magazine's editor, Hermann L. Gremliza, wrote an editorial devoted to the outbreak of fighting in the occupied territories in which he basically regurgitated the official line of the Israeli government.

He began his editorial by describing a scene widely shown on television some weeks ago of an unarmed Arab man seeking shelter from the bullets of Israeli soldiers with his 12-year-old son. In the course of a fierce assault by Israeli troops the boy was shot through the heart by Israeli soldiers and died. The scene was reportedly widely in the media and regarded in Western countries as evidence of the ruthlessness with which Israeli troops were persecuting their war against the Palestinians.

Gremliza saw things differently. The scene, he wrote, was enough “to make one weep”. He then continues, “It is also enough to make one puke.” He then goes on to accuse the media of exploiting the incident to put Israel in a bad light. In the nauseating and cynical language which characterises his regular column, Gremliza proceeded to damn Arabs defending their lives and homes.

His description of Muslim rebels involved in the fighting echoes that of a racist Mossad policeman. He writes: “For example, Islam, the particular features of which include that every young believer, pledged to chastity, receives as payment for an assassination in which he is blown up along with a large number of Jews, the chance to have sex [Gremliza uses a cruder expression] with a dozen virgins in paradise.” In the

same passage he goes on to describe ultra right-winger and Likud party leader Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Temple Mount, which unleashed the current conflict, as “a harmless visit made on a daily basis by dozens of tourists”.

In its December edition the magazine returns to the same theme. The regular interview in the magazine is devoted to Menachem Kanafi, the first secretary of the Israeli embassy in Berlin. In his interview Kanafi repeats the version of events in the West Bank which has been used on numerous occasions by officials of the Israeli government, i.e., that the deaths of Arab children in the occupied territories are part of a deliberate strategy by the Palestinians, who send the children to the front line as so-called “telegenic martyrs”.

The opinion voiced by Kanafi is repeated almost word for word by one of *konkret's* main contributors, Jürgen Elsässer; and for anyone who may have missed the point a third article in the same edition by Horst Pankow returns to the topic. According to Pankow, recent reports in the German press over crimes committed by the Israeli security forces amount to an “anti-Jewish alliance of denunciation”.

Horst Pankow goes even further in an additional article written for another radical magazine called *Bahamas*. In this second article he describes Palestinian Arabs as “currently the most aggressive anti-Semitic collective” and then goes on to advise Barak and the Israeli government: “The Israeli state can only repulse with the utmost severity the destructive anger of Palestinians, prepared to accept their own deaths with a mere shrug of the shoulders.”

In line with its latest policy shift it is difficult to know what concrete alliances are being forged behind the scenes. But in its virulent advocacy of Israeli state interests one element emerges which already characterised *konkret's* cynical treatment of the *Kursk* tragedy—utter contempt by those involved with the magazine for social issues and the living conditions of broad masses of people.

The *WSWS* has written many times on the conflict in the Middle East. We have made absolutely clear our opposition to the expansionist policies of Israel, a form of garrison state founded on the basis of the brutal suppression of the national rights of the Palestinian masses. Today the Israeli state is increasingly in the

sway of extreme right-wing and neo-fascist elements, as hostile to the Jewish working class as they are to the Arab masses. These are the forces which are now receiving succour from sections of the former radical left in Germany.

The present crisis has also served to reveal the reactionary nature of the nationalism advocated by Yassir Arafat's PLO and Hamas, which undermines the only possible progressive perspective for the region—the unity of the Arab masses with Israeli workers against the Israeli state and its capitalist backers.

At the same time no genuine progressive movement or intellectual can remain indifferent to the deplorable social conditions of the Arab masses and the thoroughly unequal military offensive launched by the Israeli state. In fact, a lasting solution to the conflicts in the Middle East can only come about when urgent social issues affecting both the Arab and Israeli peoples in the region are addressed.

Already, prior to the latest crisis, unemployment of Palestinians in the occupied territories stood at 50 percent. Tens of thousands live in miserable camp-like conditions with electricity and water in irregular supply.

Life in the region has been made additionally intolerable by the division of the territory into a myriad of small colonies existing under virtual armed siege policed by Palestinian and Israeli security forces. This was the normal state of affairs until the current outbreak of fighting. Now, following the closure of check-point crossings, many Palestinians have been cut off from their main source of income—work inside Israel itself. The West Bank and occupied territories have been overrun by tanks and subjected to continuous bombardment by Israeli fighter planes and helicopter gunships. Deaths in the conflict stand at 15 Palestinians for every Israeli.

Under such conditions *konkret's* espousal of Israeli state interests and cheerleading for the current bloodbath being undertaken by Israeli troops is nothing less than a political abomination.



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