

# German radicals defend Israeli state brutality in the West Bank-Part 2

## Konkret's treatment of anti-Semitism and fascism

Stefan Steinberg  
11 December 2000

*This is the conclusion of a two-part article. The first part was posted on December 9.*

The article by regular contributor Jurgen Elsasser in the latest *konkret* (concrete), the German left radical magazine, assumes almost surreal forms as he attempts to draw a parallel between Likud leader Ariel Sharon and former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. Both, he argues, are the victims of a ruthless propaganda campaign by European politicians and the media.

The German government is depicted as sponsoring Moslem fundamentalism and, in a variation of the motto “the enemy (Israel) of my enemy (Germany) is my friend”, Elsässer ends up as a sounding board for the Israeli propaganda machine. Elsässer describes Sharon as a “farsighted” politician and quotes with approval right-wing former Premier Benyamin Netanyahu, who recently expressed his concern “that politicians in Europe, where a third of the Jewish people were killed in the Holocaust, want to force a solution upon Israel”.

This last quote indicates the main line of argument for Hermann L. Gremliza (the head of *konkret* since 1974) and Elsässer. Anybody who disagrees with their virulent defence of the interests of the Israeli state and security forces is condemned as anti-Semitic.

The issue is bluntly put by Horst Pankow in his article for the *Bahamas* magazine where he writes: “A radical anti-national and anti-German left, which has ascribed to the fundamental negation of state and economy, should not just accept the contradiction of defending the national interests of Israel because Germany is more openly and effectively supporting the enemies of Israel. It should take this step, above all, in its own interests. For another mass murder of Jews, a repetition of Auschwitz, would destroy all hopes of emancipating human society from capital and the state.”

In the circles of German radicals and intellectuals around *konkret* and *Bahamas* the accusation of anti-Semitism draws its potency from a long tradition of distorting the history of the growth and development of fascism and anti-Semitism in favour of a variety of “German collective guilt” for Nazi crimes and the eradication of the Jews. A recent sixtieth birthday tribute to Gremliza in the right-wing FAZ newspaper made a correct point: “His [Gremliza's] trick as an author is to put an equal sign, at every opportunity, between national-socialist and today's Germany. To his right he sees a block which ranges from Schröder [leader of the Social Democratic Party—SPD] to Schönhuber [former member of the SS and neo-fascist Republican Party].”

Together with his theory that today's Germany is largely in the grasp of fascist forces, a range of articles in Gremliza's magazine reiterate the thesis, made popular by Daniel Goldhagen in his book *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, that fascism is a sort of primordial, peculiarly German phenomenon with deep roots in the German population as a whole.

Contributors to *konkret* are outraged by any evidence or historical work which suggests that fascism is not endemic to the majority of the German population but has distinct social and historical roots bound up with the development of capitalism. In the same December edition which takes sides with the Israeli government against the Palestinians, and in a review of new books dealing with the Holocaust, *konkret* author Tjark Kunstreich vigorously opposes evidence put forward by French author Enzo Traverso that at the start of the twentieth century just 2 percent of the German electorate voted in elections for an openly anti-Semitic party. This does not fit into Kunstreich's picture of the Germans as a homogenous anti-

Semitic mob, and he concludes that Traverso has overlooked the fact that “anti-Semitism was already so widespread in Germany at that time that it did not require its own party”!

A similar line of argument was also put forward last December in the course of a series of articles in *konkret* written by contributor Matthias Künzel, which dealt with the reaction by leading members of the German Frankfurt School to the rise of fascism. In his articles Künzel praises the “pioneering” work of Daniel Goldhagen, but his main target is to attack the manner in which members of the Frankfurt School attempted to deal with the rise of fascism and analyse its roots in the crisis of capitalism and the strategy of the German ruling class.

The combined experiences of fascism and Stalinism had profound repercussions for members of the Frankfurt School and in the post-war period a number of leading figures made clear their growing disillusionment in any prospect for the progressive transformation of society. The despair of leading members of the Frankfurt School upon learning of the extent of the extermination of the Jews is summed up in Adorno's comment that poetry is impossible after Auschwitz. It would be very mistaken, however, to associate members of the Frankfurt School with the crude form of “collective guilt thesis” which Künzel supports.

In his articles Künzel objects in particular to a text jointly drawn up by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in 1959. Künzel cites a truncated excerpt from the article, an introduction written by Horkheimer and Adorno for Paul Massing's book *The Prehistory of Political Anti-Semitism*. It is worth quoting in full the passage which Künzel edits: “It is by no means the case that totalitarian anti-Semitism is a specifically German phenomenon. Attempts to understand it based on such a questionable entity as national character, the impoverished scraps of what was once known as *Volksgeist*, trivialise the inexplicable which we have to try to understand. Scientific consciousness should not cut its work short by reducing the enigma of anti-Semitic irrationality to a formula which is equally irrational. Instead the enigma requires a social solution and that is impossible within the sphere of nation peculiarities. In the event, totalitarian anti-Semitism owed its German triumph to a constellation of economic and social factors, and by no means the characteristics or standpoint of a people, which in its own right, spontaneously, has perhaps exhibited less racial hatred than other civilised countries which drove out or exterminated their Jews hundreds of years ago” (1959

introduction to Paul W. Massing's *Vorgeschichte des politischen Antisemitismus*, Frankfurt/M 1986).

Künzel is distraught by this passage and his series of articles in *konkret* is aimed at proving just the reverse—i.e., that fascism is a specifically German problem. Instead of the materialist attempt made by Horkheimer and Adorno to understand anti-Semitism, Künzel prefers an apocalyptic metaphor from writer Jehuda Bauer: “The Holocaust was a special case, erupting like a huge volcano from a dark and threatening landscape.”

For some years *konkret* has functioned as a conduit for such theories by people like Kunstreich and Künzel. Now, today, the logic of *konkret's* ahistorical efforts to reduce fascism to a particularity of German history and embrace the ideology of Goldhagen has won it new friends amongst the most reactionary Zionist circles.

As we noted in the case of the Kursk tragedy, *konkret's* regular withering critique of nationalism in German politics (Gremliza's latest collection of essays is entitled *Against Germany*) did not prevent the magazine from supporting the most reactionary Russian nationalist interests. In his reply to Ralf Schröder posted October 6 on the WSWS (“The nationalistic reflex: left-wing newspapers in Germany exhibit unrestrained enthusiasm for Putin”), Peter Schwarz ended his critique with the warning that “it would not be the first time that left-wing intellectuals have switched to the enemy camp on the eve of big class struggles.” That was in September. Now *konkret* is supporting the military activities of one of the most reactionary governments on the planet. The process has taken about a month!



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**