

Defend Günter Grass!

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On Wednesday, the 84-year-old writer and Nobel literature prizewinner Günter Grass published a poem in which he sharply criticized Israel for its hostile stance towards Iran. His poem, entitled “What must be said,” was published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

The text by Grass (translated from the German) begins: “Why am I silent, silent too long/ about what is obvious and is being/ practiced in war games, at the end of which those surviving/ will be footnotes at best.” Grass accuses the Israeli government of exploiting the “right to strike first” in order to attack a country where “the construction of a nuclear bomb” has not been proven, but merely “suspected.”

Israel, on the other hand, has “a growing nuclear capacity,” which it keeps secret and is “out of control,” because it is “closed to any scrutiny.” Grass criticizes the cynical politics of the German government, which delivers “another U-boat to Israel,” with the capacity to fire “every type of destructive warhead.” The government justifies its supply of arms by arguing that it is reparation for the crimes committed by Germany in the past.

Grass then states bluntly: “The nuclear power of Israel endangers an already fragile world peace,” and raises the question: “But why have I kept quiet until now....Why do I say only now, aged and with my last drop of ink?” He replies that the accusations of “anti-Semitism” are ubiquitous and have silenced him up to now. Grass refers to Israel as the country “to which I am tied, and will remain so.”

Finally, Grass says that he is fed up with the “hypocrisy of the West.” He calls upon others to break their silence and demand together with him the “permanent control of Israel’s nuclear potential and Iranian nuclear facilities by an international body.”

With the ink barely dry on his text, Grass was confronted with a vicious media campaign, including many accusations of anti-Semitism.

Die Welt conservative newspaper, Henryk M. Broder defames Grass as a “prototype of the educated anti-Semite.” Grass has always had “problems with Jews,” Broder writes, “but had never articulated his opinions as clearly as in this ‘poem.’” The president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Dieter Graumann, refers to the poem as an “irresponsible” and “aggressive agitational tract.” Alluding to one of Grass’s best known novels, *The Tin Drum*, Graumann states: “Grass is talking tin (nonsense) and drumming in the wrong direction.”

The official representative of Israel in Germany, Emmanuel Nahshon, wrote on his embassy web site that it was part of the European tradition to “accuse the Jews of ritual murder just before the Passover. Formerly it was the blood of Christian children which was allegedly used by the Jews to make unleavened bread, today it is the Iranian nation that the Jewish state supposedly wishes to wipe out.”

The main political parties in Germany weighed in as well. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) politician and president of the German-Israeli Society, Reinhold Robbe, accused Grass of making claims that were “so general and meagre, that they defy consideration in any detail.”

The general secretary of the SPD, Andrea Nahles, declared Grass’s text to be “thin, self-centred, vain and superfluous.” Given the situation in the Middle East, she regards the poem as “irritating and inappropriate.” The general secretary of the Christian Democratic Union, Hermann Gröhe, said he was “appalled at the tone and bias of this poem.”

Under the headline “An eruption of anti-Semitism,” the editor of the weekly *Die Zeit*, Josef Joffe, angrily attacked Grass. The new anti-Semitism is complicated, he writes, because it feeds from the subconscious, which “is constrained by powerful of taboos—shame and guilt.” But the unconscious mind seeks to express

itself, as Freud taught. This leads to “hypocrisy and dishonesty.”

Joffe then goes on in disgraceful fashion to assert a link between Grass and neo-fascists. He claims that Grass is “swinging the Auschwitz club” in a similar manner to “typical NPD pamphlets.” The arguments of the far right are well known and widespread, Joffe continues. First the Jews forced the Germans to resort to the Holocaust, and then used German guilt to pressure every subsequent German government into submission. In every case the guilty party is always the Jew, Joffe concludes his vile diatribe against Grass.

On Thursday, Grass replied to his critics and lamented the apparent “uniformity of opinion.” In an interview for the *Norddeutscher Rundfunk*, he said that the stance adopted in political circles and the media was almost universal. It consisted in “not just addressing the content of the poem, but undertaking a personal campaign, claiming that my reputation has been damaged for all time.”

It is necessary to vigorously defend Günter Grass and reject the despicable campaign against him. Grass’s warning of a war against Iran and his statement, “The nuclear power of Israel endangers an already fragile world peace,” is quite correct. It deserves recognition and support.

There can be no doubt that the war preparations against Iran by the Israeli government are in an advanced stage. In late January, the *New York Times* ran a lengthy article entitled, “Will Israel attack Iran?” The article confirms that Israeli preparations for military strikes against Iran are proceeding with great speed and intensity. The author—Ronen Bergman, a political analyst with the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*—concluded: “Having spoken with several senior Israeli leaders and the heads of military and intelligence agencies, I am of the opinion that Israel will strike against Iran in 2012.”

Bergman said that since Ehud Barak had taken over as defense minister, the Israeli military had “prepared for an attack on Iran in an unprecedented manner.” The Israeli Air Force “has long-range aircraft which can attack Iran and unmanned drones that can drop bombs on these targets and stay up in the air for up to 48 hours.” The Israeli forces have also prepared plans to respond to possible Iranian reprisals.

In mid-March, the Israeli government intensified its

deadly air strikes on Gaza. Israeli drones killed Zohair al-Qaisi, the secretary of the Popular Resistance Committees, and his military attaché, Mahmoud al-Hannani. These killings were planned. Their aim was to provoke the Palestinian population to engage in reprisals, which would then serve as a pretext for further acts of war.

Netanyahu and his right-wing coalition government in Israel are plagued by divisions and corruption scandals and face growing popular opposition. One of the main reasons for the systematic preparation for war by Israel’s ruling elite is to divert attention from the regime’s internal problems.

The charge that Grass is an anti-Semite because he criticized the policies of the Israeli government is completely unfounded. Anti-Semitism is the term used to describe racist hatred aimed at the oppression and persecution of Jews—and in the case of the Third Reich, the extermination of Jews. Grass’s criticisms of the war policy of the Netanyahu government are not directed against Jews, nor against Jews in Israel. His overwhelming concern is the well-being of both the Jewish population in Israel and the Iranian people. This is in stark contrast to the Israeli government.

The Israeli regime does not represent the interests of the Jewish population, but rather a tiny rich and corrupt clique that has always worked closely with American imperialism. An attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities has dwindling support in the Israeli population. Recent polls show that only 19 percent favor independent action by the Israeli government. Only 42 percent support a war carried out with the support of Washington.

The outcry in the media and political circles against the warning of war by Günter Grass is an alarm signal. It is the prelude to a war-mongering campaign aimed at justifying a military adventure that could plunge the entire Middle East, and then the world, into a new conflagration.

Therefore: Defend Günter Grass!



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