

Stop the warmongers! Defend Günter Grass!

Wolfgang Weber
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The political poem by the 84-year-old writer Günter Grass warning against Israel's war policy, published simultaneously by a number of European and international newspapers last week, has unleashed an unprecedented witch-hunt by the media and leading political figures.

The campaign of defamation against one of the world's best known writers, a recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature and many other awards, makes clear that the German ruling class and its counterparts in Washington and Tel Aviv are intent on intimidating and silencing anyone who dares to criticise the preparations for war against Iran.

Josef Joffe, co-editor of *Die Zeit*, described Grass as an anti-Semite who acquired his hatred for Jews during his membership in the Nazi SS as a 16-year-old.

Beate Klarsfeld, the recent candidate of the Left Party for the German presidency and a supporter of French President Nicholas Sarkozy, went so far as to compare Grass to Hitler. The difference, she said, was that the former uses the word "Israel" for his anti-Semitic agitation while Hitler referred to "international Jewish finance."

Mathias Döpfner, CEO of the Axel Springer media group, attacked the writer in an article entitled "The Core of the Onion is Brown," alluding to one of the last novels by Grass.

Grass's brief sojourn as a teenager in the Waffen-SS is a red herring being thrown up to change the subject from the writer's correct and principled opposition to Israel's war-mongering against Iran to the entirely unfounded and libelous charge of anti-Semitism. The method of character assassination is consistent with the political substance of the attack on Grass—a reactionary defense of aggression and provocation against the oil-rich Persian Gulf country.

Grass was drafted as a 16-year-old into military service shortly before the end of World War II. The

posting was not of his choice. In the few weeks of his membership in the SS he was not involved in any crime and did not even fire a shot. After the war, he devoted his entire literary output to one purpose: confronting the past—Nazism, War and the Holocaust—and the struggle against any recurrence of such evils.

The shamelessness of the slander and the aggressiveness of the campaign by all of the major media outlets in Germany are reminiscent of the pro-war press in the First World War and the incitements of violence by nationalists and fascists directed against pacifist circles and writers such as Erich Maria Remarque, Kurt Tucholsky, Carl von Ossietzky and Erwin Piscator.

For such forces, no lie is too big, no calumny too base.

Grass in his poem stated a number of truths about US and Israeli war plans. He accused the Israeli government of assuming the right to carry out "a preemptive strike" against a country that is presumed, but not proven, to be building a nuclear bomb. He noted that Israel has "a growing nuclear capacity," which it keeps secret and which is "out of control" because it is "closed to any scrutiny."

Grass criticized the cynical politics of the German government, which has delivered "another U-boat to Israel" with the capacity to fire "every type of destructive warhead." The government cynically justifies its arming of Israel, he noted, by presenting it as reparation for the crimes committed by Germany in the past.

Grass went on to declare bluntly that, "the nuclear power Israel endangers an already fragile world peace." He addressed the German past, writing of a "country of crime without comparison." His criticism was directed, he stressed, at the Israeli government and not Israel itself—"a country to which I am bound and will remain bound."

The Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately confirmed its aggressive and undemocratic character by declaring Grass persona non grata and banning him from entering the country.

Neither the anti-democratic measures of the Israeli government nor the media and political witch-hunt can alter the truth of Grass's assertions. Israel has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and has maintained an illegal arsenal of nuclear weapons for decades. The German government has supported this criminal policy, most recently with the delivery of six U-boats capable of launching nuclear warheads.

Iran, on the other hand, has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and has allowed the International Atomic Energy Agency to carry out regular inspections of its nuclear research program and nuclear facilities. This is despite the fact that absolutely no evidence has been brought forth to show that Iran is using its nuclear facilities for military purposes.

In addition to diplomatic and economic attacks and military threats, the US and Israel have for years been carrying out covert actions, including terrorist attacks, against Iran. Five Iranian nuclear scientists have been murdered, spy drones fly over Iran on a regular basis, and both explosives and cyber attacks have been employed to sabotage industrial facilities in the country.

None of these facts are mentioned in the German newspapers. Instead, they all parrot the propaganda of the US, the European Union and Israel that Iran "will very soon have nuclear weapons and use them against Israel"—a unanimous chorus that Grass quite correctly brands as something one would expect from the media in a dictatorship.

As in all slanders, there is no serious attempt to substantiate the charges of anti-Semitism against Grass. Instead, criticism of Israeli policy is demagogically equated with hatred of the Jews. The accusers ignore the fact that a large majority of Israelis are opposed to an Israeli military attack on Iran.

The smear campaign against Grass is aimed at covering up the real reasons for the war preparations. They have no more to do with Iran's alleged pursuit of nuclear weapons than the drive to war against Iraq was motivated by that country's supposed weapons of mass destruction and ties to Al Qaeda. Once again, lies are being used to conceal a drive to maintain the military

domination of the United States and its main Middle East ally Israel over a strategic region and its vast energy resources.

The vicious and coordinated character of the witch-hunt against Grass indicates that the ruling elite in Germany has decided to support a war against Iran. There are certainly concerns in Berlin over the prospect of US military hegemony in the region, reflected in Germany's initial reservations towards the NATO war against Libya. But precisely because German imperialism is not prepared to cede control of the Middle East to the US or Germany's main European rivals, France and Britain, it feels it must join in the rape of Iran.

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle's broadside against Grass suggests that the German government is determined to be on board from the start in the next imperialist war—against Iran. Berlin looks upon the accelerating aggression against Syria as a welcome prelude to the bigger operation to come.

Leading figures of all parties in the German political establishment—the Christian Democratic Union, the Free Democrats, the Social Democratic Party, the Greens, the Left Party—have joined in the vendetta against Grass, demonstrating support for a new imperialist war across the entire official political spectrum, including the nominal "left."

It is this campaign for war that poses the real threat to both the Iranian people and the Jewish population in Israel, not Günter Grass.

All those who oppose war in the Middle East and the growing threat of a new world war must defend Günter Grass and oppose the warmongers in Berlin, Washington and Tel-Aviv as well as their lackeys in the media.

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