

Hands off the Socialist Equality Party in Germany!

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26 April 2012

The assault on three meetings of the Socialist Equality Party in Germany (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG) in defence of Günter Grass represents an enormous intensification of the attacks on democratic rights. They must be opposed and rejected.

The PSG organized the meetings to counter the unprecedented attacks on the 84-year-old writer and Nobel laureate Grass. Ever since he pointed out in his poem “What must be said” the indisputable fact that nuclear-armed Israel is preparing a war against Iran, Grass has faced a scurrilous smear campaign. His statements are distorted, and his biography falsified. No accusation is too outrageous, no insult too depraved to be used against him.

Right-wing pro-Israeli provocateurs, in close collaboration with government and university authorities, have sought to block the meetings of the PSG from taking place. Their attacks have become increasingly intense.

Last Friday, a group of provocateurs tried unsuccessfully to break up a PSG meeting in Frankfurt. They occupied the staircase in front of the meeting room, harassed and threatened those attending and unfurled Israeli and American flags.

On Monday, the administration at the Berlin Technical University cancelled the use of a meeting room on short notice. According to a member of the university administration, this decision took into account “the relationship with the representatives of the state of Israel,” an unmistakable indication that the university was being placed under political pressure. When the PSG tried to move to another venue, the police intervened and put the manager under pressure so that she withdrew permission to use the meeting room. The meeting eventually took place after moving again to a nearby café.

On Tuesday, several dozen right-wing provocateurs then tried to invade a PSG meeting at the University of Leipzig. They denounced Günter Grass, harassed the stewards and threatened a leading representative of the PSG with an ice pick (the murder weapon used to kill Leon Trotsky). When they were denied admission to the meeting, they blocked access to the room and held their own meeting in the stairwell, complete with megaphone and Israeli flags.

Two representatives of the university’s student council who then turned up did not call on those holding the unauthorized demonstration to move, but rather intervened to shut down the duly authorised meeting in defence of Günter Grass. They claimed that because the event was public, even the troublemakers must be let in. They knew very well that no one holding a meeting is obliged to grant access to an organized group that is threatening physical violence and has the stated intention of disrupting the event.

The political significance of the concerted attacks on three events organised by the PSG and its student organisation the ISSE within five days could not be clearer. They confirm that the attacks on Grass himself have been organised by the media and at the highest government levels in order to intimidate and silence any opposition to an aggressive revival of militarism.

The German government has been trying for years to find ways to overcome the widespread public opposition to militarism and war. Even in the war on Libya, Berlin felt unable to directly participate. Now they are trying to use an ugly smear campaign to enforce a change of course. They do not want to be sidelined in any future war in the Middle East.

The cynicism with which the charge of anti-Semitism has been hurled against Grass is breath-taking. In an article headlined “Anti-Semitism wants to get out,” the

editor of *Die Zeit* Josef Joffe linked Grass to the worst Jew baiters. The same hysteria could be seen in other prominent newspapers, not to mention the tabloids. Yet everyone knows that following World War Two, the German ruling class protected hundreds of thousands of Nazis and even appointed one as Chancellor.

It is not an accident that Grass has become the target of a smear campaign. He is the greatest living German writer, and his literary life has been dedicated to dealing with the Nazi dictatorship. If it is possible to discredit and silence him, they calculate, then no one else would dare to rebel. If Grass, the most famous German writer, can be dragged through the mud, those less famous can only imagine the threats they would face.

The vilification of Grass has been followed by the attacks on the PSG's meetings. Because the PSG organised a public campaign in defence of Grass, it had to be silenced.

The close coordination of the attacks in Frankfurt, Berlin and Leipzig, as well as the collaboration of right-wing provocateurs, police and university authorities makes clear that strings are being pulled at the highest state level. The attacks followed a familiar pattern: a right-wing provocation was used to close down an event organised by a left wing workers' organization. Before 1933, this was common practice in Germany.

The "Anti-Germans," from whose ranks the provocateurs in Frankfurt and Leipzig came, are a reactionary political force that is well connected to the Israeli and German establishments. They view the German working class as reactionary and have publicly defended the firebombing of Dresden in World War Two, which killed tens of thousands of innocent civilians. They are specialists in justifying the worst imperialist crimes using the false accusation of anti-Semitism. They describe Islam as a new form of fascism and supported the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. They even reject the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations on the grounds that "no concessions can be made to a nationalist-Islamist collective of Jew-haters like the so-called Palestinians, currently gripped by destructive mania."

Joffe, the editor of *Die Zeit*, is also a specialist in imperialist propaganda. He maintains close links with the American neo-cons, campaigned in 2003 for the Iraq war and spread the lie about alleged Iraqi weapons

of mass destruction.

The attempt to silence Günter Grass and to stop the meetings of the PSG is reminiscent of the darkest chapter of German history. The suppression of those opposed to war in the Weimar Republic helped pave the way for Hitler's rise to power. Thus, the pacifist publisher of the *Weltbühne*, Carl von Ossietzky, was sentenced to jail in 1931 for spying because he had publicly exposed the illegal rearmament of the Reichswehr, as the German army was then known. After taking power, the Nazis put him in a concentration camp. He eventually died from the effects of torture, starvation and forced labour.

Reject the attacks on the PSG! They are an attack on the basic democratic rights of all. We will continue to intensify the campaign in defence of Günter Grass. We call on all readers of the WSWs to support the PSG against the attacks on its basic rights.

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