

World famous German author Günter Grass dies at age 87

Peter Schwarz
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German author Günter Grass has died at the age of 87 in Lübeck, Germany following an infection. He is one of the most important German writers of the 20th century and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1999.

Born in Danzig in 1927, Grass was a member of a generation whose youth was marked by Nazism. He was seven years old when Hitler came to power and eighteen when the Third Reich collapsed.

After the war Grass studied graphics and sculpture. In the mid-1950s he also turned to writing. His literary breakthrough came in 1959 with his first novel, *The Tin Drum*, which became a worldwide success.

The central themes of *The Tin Drum*—coming to terms with National Socialism and its background, the problem of guilt and memory—played a central role in most of Grass’s subsequent novels and stories. In 2006 he published his memoirs under the title, *Peeling the Onion*.

Grass did not limit his social commitment to the realm of art. Towards the end of his life he increasingly took up pressing political issues and did not shy away from fierce disputes. His political views never rose above social democratic reformist politics, but he was prepared to clash with the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) on such issues as militarism and democratic rights.

Grass was especially active with the SPD in the 1960s in the election campaigns of Willy Brandt, supporting the latter’s *Ostpolitik* (opening up towards the east) which he regarded as a means of reconciliation. He resigned from the SPD in 1993 when the party agreed to the de facto abolition of the right to asylum.

The *World Socialist Web Site* will publish an assessment of Grass’s life and work in the coming

days. Today we provide links to a number of articles that deal with Grass critically, while defending him against political attacks from the right.

In 1999 the WSWS published a review and critical comments on his book *My Century*, a collection of hundreds of stories, each dedicated to a year of the 20th century.

In 2006, the WSWS defended the Nobel Prize winner in the article “Günter Grass and the Waffen-SS” against grotesquely exaggerated accusations made by his political opponents in response to his belated admission that he had been called up into the Nazi Waffen-SS at the end of the war as a 17-year-old.

Six years later, in 2012, these accusations blew up again after Grass published the poem “What must be said” in a number of international newspapers. He accused the “nuclear power, Israel” of endangering “the already fragile world peace” with its threats directed against Iran. Although Grass called merely for international control of Israel’s nuclear weapons and Iranian nuclear facilities, while at the same time stressing his attachment to Israel, he was accused of anti-Semitism and placed on a par with the Nazis.

The WSWS published the comments “Defend Günter Grass!” and “Stop the warmongers! Defend Günter Grass!”

Meetings conducted by the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party, PSG) in defense of Günter Grass in Frankfurt, Berlin and Leipzig were subsequently attacked by far right provocateurs. Peter Schwarz summed up these experiences, and Ulrich Rippert dealt with Grass’s relationship to the SPD, which had lined up with the author’s opponents.

Finally a resolution passed at a congress of the PSG pointed out how the perfidious attacks on Grass were directly bound up with the revival of German

militarism.



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