Antisemitic Anti-Zionism Within the German Left—Die Linke

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1. INTRODUCTION

This essay analyzes the antisemitic anti-Zionism of the radical left in Germany and focuses mainly on the far left party Die Linke.¹ For several years, Die Linke has played an increasingly large role within the German political spectrum. The party was founded in 2007 as a result of the fusion of two other parties: the successor of the Eastern German Communist Party (SED) and the Election Alternative for Social Justice (WASG), a group of disgruntled social democrats and labor unionists who had split from the moderate left-wing Social Democratic Party (SPD). Currently, Die Linke is a hodgepodge of different, sometimes contradictory political ideologies ranging from orthodox Stalinists to moderate reformers. The evolution and composition of the party is thus hard to predict. Still, one thing is certain: Die Linke has become a major player in German politics and has a strong influence on the European left in general. In Germany’s last parliamentary elections in 2009, it gained 12 percent of the vote. In addition, it is the fourth strongest party in the Bundestag—Germany’s federal parliament. Several of its members hold seats in the European Parliament. At the present, it is the most important party in the European Left, an association of leftist parties in the European Union.² Die Linke is represented in 13 of Germany’s 16 state parliaments and is part of the governing coalitions in two states, including Berlin. In elections held during the past two years, Die Linke increased its share of the vote to 28 percent in the Eastern states of Germany (former GDR) and to an impressive 20 percent in some Western parts of Germany. This information is crucial to understanding the relevance of the following analysis.

2. OVERVIEW OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE GERMAN LEFT SINCE REUNIFICATION: THE EMERGENCE OF A LEFTIST PRO-ISRAEL POSITION

Recently, a small but audible segment of the German left has started to consider criticism of antisemitism—and equally of anti-Zionism and anti-Americanism—as central to


² See: <http://www.european-left.org> (last visited September 30, 2010).
the renewal of a progressive view of modern society. This includes support of Israel, which is in direct opposition to the position of the mainstream left.\(^3\)

The emergence of a pro-Israel left is connected to developments in German society since reunification in 1990. The debate within the left should be regarded as a result of the profound political changes that took place at this time. Reunification was seen by many leftists as a reversal of the outcome of the Second World War. The reunification of Germany coincided with a wave of pogroms and racist attacks against foreigners, asylum seekers, and Jews. This led to fears of a “Fourth Reich” and the re-emergence of German imperialism. In retrospect, these fears were completely unfounded. Nevertheless, they were a direct consequence of a decisive rupture in German and European history. The decline of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War caused the world view of many leftists to collapse, even if they had never supported Soviet-style communism. The apparent victory of capitalism and of liberal democracy turned the established ideology of leftist thinking on its head and caused a fundamental disorientation.

At the time, a debate about the history of the left and its mistakes slowly started to emerge, and a small segment of the German left began to deal self-critically with anti-Zionism, anti-imperialism, and its relationship with the State of Israel. Several leftist magazines even supported the second Gulf War in 1990-1991.\(^4\) More members of the left supported the war against the Taliban after 9/11, and some unexpectedly supported the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship in Iraq in 2003.\(^5\)

3. THE BAK SHALOM GROUP

These changes within left-leaning groups did not fundamentally affect *Die Linke* until 2007, when a group called BAK Shalom was founded with the purpose of exposing and combating antisemitism, anti-Zionism, anti-Americanism, and what was described as regressive anticapitalism within *Die Linke*.\(^6\)


\(^4\) The most important leftist magazine at this time was (and still is) *konkret*, which featured a long and difficult debate about the Second Gulf War. Some authors supported the war, which led to the loss of half the readership. See the homepage of *konkret* at: <http://www.konkret-verlage.de/kvv/kvv.php> (last visited September 29, 2010). There was also an extensive debate in the left in general. See, for example, Klaus Schönberger and Claus Köstler, *Der freie Westen, der vernünftige Krieg, seine linken Liebhaber und ihr okzidentaler Rassismus oder wie die Herrschaft der neuen Weltordnung in den Köpfen begann* (Grafenau: Trotzdem-Verlag, 1992).
