



Germany's Trip to the "Bahamas"

**From a Product of the Left
to a Neo-Authoritarian Sect**

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A Note on the Translation

All footnotes were written by us to clarify for the reader terms that may be common knowledge to people living in Germany. Additionally, the original text did not contain references. Where possible, we have ensured the quotes translated from English used their corresponding originals, but in many cases we had to translate the German back to English.

What continues today as the “antideutsch¹ movement” is the end product of a political process that began a decade and a half ago – and in which the author of these lines played a certain part in its initial phase. The first “hard core” of this ideological current emerged in the early nineties, and the current grouping around the magazine *Bahamas* can be traced back to it; other groups only joined later. However, the path that led from the beginnings in 1990 to the current sect is a tortuous one; it leads through splits and ideological changes.

How It All Began

More fitting than the title of Bommi Baumann’s well-known book on the protest movement of the years around 1968 (*How It All Began*), the introduction to the history of the antideutsch should be entitled “How It All Ended.” This is because the starting point of this development was not a casting off as in the late 1960s, but a collapse: the widespread implosion or self-abolition of a radical left that aimed to change society. This collapse was initially gradual, later – accelerated by contemporary events – very rapid. Parallel to this, however, there was also an attempt to not only maintain the previous social critique and the perspectives of social emancipation, but to sharpen them and expand them with new aspects in order to give them perspectives that survive history. This experiment, in its concrete form, has ultimately failed: it has produced those groups that call themselves “antideutsch,” which are no longer part of the solution, but part of the problem.

The culmination of this development occurred in the few months between the wave of emigration from the GDR,² which began in August 1989 with the embassy refugees from Prague, and the official completion of German reunification on October 3rd, 1990. During this period, the term “antideutsch” appeared for the first time as a positive self-description within the left: an article in the Marxist monthly *AK* (until 1988 still *Arbeiterkampf*)³ and organ of the *Kommunistischer Bund*⁴ (KB), later

¹ “Anti-German.”

² “German Democratic Republic,” also known as East Germany.

³ “Worker’s Struggle.”

⁴ “Communist League.”

*Analyse & Kritik*⁵) at the beginning of February 1990 bears the programmatic title *Weshalb die Linke anti-deutsch sein muß*.⁶ The author of the article, which was highly controversial in the KB, signed it as “Jürgen Stuttgart.” He was Jürgen Elsässer, who was working as a vocational school teacher in Stuttgart at the time and would later become a journalist and author, who distanced himself from the later “antideutsch” epigones in the period between the war in Yugoslavia in 1999 and the war in Afghanistan in 2001.

The article quoted characterizes the process that has begun, which will lead to the reunification of the FRG⁷ and the GDR a few months later, in the following words: “A state shakes off a geographical and a political boundary that has tamed its expansionist and perhaps even fascist potential over the past 40 years.” It is predicted: if the neighboring states accepted the consummation of the unification of the two German states, “who would then still want to forbid them (the Germans) the atomic bomb, the removal of the right of asylum from the constitution, participation in military interventions?” At least with regard to the latter two points, the author should indeed be proven right in the coming years. In this situation, according to Elsässer, it is important to take a sharp counter-position to the prevailing tendency, because “the dynamics of events can unravel all half-measures within months, even weeks.” Therefore, an “antinationalist and thus antideutsch view is necessary in order to understand the current events and develop counter-strategies”; “the dissolution of the German people into a multicultural society” should be demanded.

The self-designation as “antinational” and “antideutsch” thus emerged for the first time in the turbulent landscape of the winter of 1989/90, in which historical upheavals suddenly became apparent. Nevertheless, the associated political undercurrent did not emerge spontaneously within a few weeks as a reaction to current events. Rather, it is the product of several years of development within the left.

⁵ “Analysis & Critique.”

⁶ “Wherefore the Left Must Be Anti-German.”

⁷ “Federal Republic of Germany,” also known as West Germany.

Flashback: The Left and the Peace Movement

In the early 1980s, the “new social movements” reached their greatest quantitative expansion. The term “new social movements” is used to describe protest movements that do not primarily focus on issues relating to the material distribution of social wealth (like a large part of the traditional labor movement), but rather on so-called “post-material” issues such as concerns and content. They are, for example, an expression of the search for meaning by intellectuals and young people in a highly developed industrial society, which is more or less materially saturated in some areas – the regressive “social reforms” of the neoliberal era, mass unemployment, and impoverishment processes do not yet characterize their experiences – but which poses questions about how people live together or about social hierarchies. Its beginnings and roots lie in the protests of the student movement and the *Außerparlamentarische Opposition*⁸ (APO) in the years around 1968.

In the 1970s, these movements included, for example, anti-authoritarian education and the spread of children’s stores, the new feminism, citizens’ initiatives – or the early ecology movement. The anti-nuclear movement took on the most spectacular forms of action, with building site occupations and street battles. But it was the peace movement that met with the broadest social response in the early 1980s, when the decision to station medium-range missiles (Pershing II and cruise missiles) with nuclear warheads in West Germany was met with demonstrations and sit-ins. In its initial phase in 1981, the peace movement was still relatively small and clearly left-wing. In the following two years, however, it would become much broader, ill-defined in content and have moralizing, depoliticizing undertones.

In 1983, it made the breakthrough to an actual mass movement capable of mobilizing millions of people. However, its success was based on an extremely vague collective self-image, partly fueled by irrational emotions and a sense of national victimhood.

Not that the peace movement at the time did not have a rationally com-

⁸ “Extraparliamentary Opposition.”

prehensible initial problem: there were reasonable reasons to fight against NATO's nuclear armament and the deployment of missiles. The weapons were deployed at a time of heightened international tensions. Since the inauguration of Ronald Reagan as president in January 1981, the US administration has relied on a brute strength policy to overcome the "Vietnam trauma" of American policy that had persisted since the mid-1970s. The proclaimed goal was to push back the global influence of the Soviet Union and its allies under the post-colonial regimes of the "Third World" – by force if necessary. At that time, the possibility of "winnable nuclear wars" was being considered in US leadership circles. The first research successes in the field of developing "miniaturized" nuclear weapons, whose destructive effect is to be "tamed" by reducing the "critical mass" required for ignition – for example by means of laser triggering of the chain reaction – seem to make it possible to limit the effects of a nuclear exchange of blows. (Incidentally, this research led to new successes in 2003/04, both in the USA and in France). And the rhetoric and imagination of Ronald Reagan, who had been the standard bearer of the extreme conservative right in California for years before becoming the Republican Party's presidential candidate, fed such fears and expectations. During the 1980 election campaign, he had already declared during a television appearance with televangelist Jim Bakker: "We may be the generation that sees Armageddon." In the biblical description of the Apocalypse, Armageddon refers to the idea of the final battle between good and evil, the last battle in which – according to the *Book of Revelation* – "all the cities of the nations will collapse." And four years later, President Ronald Reagan makes a momentous joke that is deeply revealing of his world of ideas. During a microphone rehearsal before a radio appearance on August 11th, 1984, he said into a working microphone: "My fellow citizens, I am pleased to inform you that I have just signed a law for the definitive abolition of the Soviet Union. The bombing of Russia will begin in five minutes."

Even if the fear of war in 1981–83 had a rational core, the West German peace movement had countless emotionally and ideologically distorted ideas about reality. First and foremost, one finds the idea of one's own nation as a predestined, defenceless victim of the USA and USSR as superpowers – whereby the somewhat more left-wing circles tried to

place the blame more strongly on US policy alone. According to this perception, which was extremely widespread at the time, the Federal Republic of Germany or “Central Europe” formed the future nuclear battlefield of the USA and the USSR, whose inhabitants would be sacrificed as pawns in the game “of the superpowers.” The Pershing IIs and cruise missiles were therefore forced upon the Western European countries where they were stationed, including the FRG, in order to use them up in the coming nuclear war if necessary. Circles within the peace movement that reacted particularly emotionally, or were particularly prone to the cult of national victimhood, even escalated this idea to talk of the “atomic holocaust,” of which the Germans (and “Central Europeans”) would be the victims in the near future. The objectively historical revisionist effect of talk of the “Holocaust of the Germans,” which swept aside the historical truth about the perpetrators of the genocide, is obvious.

In fact, the missile deployment is the result of the so-called “NATO Double-Track Decision,” which the North Atlantic Alliance passed at a special meeting of foreign and defense ministers in Brussels on December 12th, 1979. This decision, in turn, was the result of significant pressure from the then West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (SPD),⁹ who was the first Western politician to criticize the so-called “eurostrategic missile gap” during a speech at the IISS (International Institute for Strategy Studies) in London in 1977. The background to this was the “couplings” debate in Western European political and military circles: they wanted to prevent the US from disassociating itself from its European allies in the event of an international escalation and from being able to turn away from the potential scene of a war (initially fought with conventional weapons) in Europe. The Western European NATO states wanted to counter such a disengagement of their strongest military ally by pushing for the presence of US missiles that could strike the Soviet Union. In the event of war, the positions of these weapons, which represented potential targets, would automatically be included in the hostilities on European soil. However, this would also involve the USA in a potential conflict with the Soviet Union. At the time, this was called “strategic

⁹ Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands. “Social Democratic Party of Germany,” a center-left political party.

coupling”

Due to the diffuse ideology of large parts of the peace movement of 1983, which tended to imagine the German nation as a “historical victim” and “occupied country driven to war by foreign powers,” it also repeatedly contained tones that are at least potentially compatible with the agitation of German nationalists and right-wing extremists. By portraying the FRG as a potential “peasant victim of the superpowers,” the door was kept open for right-wing ideologies. For example, a Bundeswehr¹⁰ lieutenant colonel from the CSU¹¹ became active in the Green Party and entered the Bundestag in 1987 as a member of parliament under the name “peace researcher.” Mechtersheimer may be seen as a semi-pacifist because of his criticism of US rearmament policy; in reality, however, he is above all a German racist nationalist who will go on to publish his book *Friedensmacht Deutschland*¹² (1993) and lead the openly far-right “Deutschland-Bewegung.”¹³ Alfred Mechtersheimer himself recently summarized his most important motives as follows “Yes, as a child I couldn’t cope with the fact that my father fell in Russia. War: lost. Germany: lost. Father: lost. And after almost 60 years still a country occupied by foreign troops.” We are talking about the FRG here. And further: “Today, the fight against US domination and culture-destroying immigration serves both external and internal peace.” Mechtersheimer drew this lesson from the Second World War: war is bad – when Germans become its victims.

This does not summarize the general state of consciousness of the Greens and the peace movement at the time; overall, it was a rather murky mixture of (formerly) Marxist elements, partly anti-authoritarian elements, Christian fundamentalist moral sermons, a great deal of emotional moralism and concern, social democratic opposition rhetoric, and nationalist tones. However, it is by no means a coincidence that figures such as Mechtersheimer or the national revolutionary and current *Junge Freiheit*¹⁴ author Rolf Stolz, who was then a founding member of the Greens,

¹⁰ Literally “Federal Defense.” The military of the FRG.

¹¹ Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern. “Christian Social Union in Bavaria,” a conservative political party.

¹² “Germany, Power of Peace”

¹³ “Germany Movement.”

¹⁴ “Young Freedom.”

ended up there at times. As early as August 1983, the party-affiliated weekly newspaper *Die Grünen*¹⁵ dedicated a highly laudatory article to former Bavarian Interior Minister Alfred Seidl. Seidl had publicly called for “an end to Germany being a helot in NATO,” as the US nuclear weapons strategy could jeopardize the survival of the Germans. The Green Party newspaper applauded. However, Alfred Seidl, who also acted as Rudolf Hess’ defense lawyer,¹⁶ had not only criticized the US arms build-up, but also called for Germany to have its own nuclear weapons.

So later when the “antideutsch” sectarians detested nothing in the world as much as the mere word “peace movement” and instead demonstratively became ardent supporters of US warfare, this is then also partly a late reckoning with or overreaction to the left-wing involvement in the real German peace movement of 1983/87. However, the mirror-image reversal of an old mistake does not automatically result in correctness...

Left Reorientation and the “Auschwitz-in-the-Sand”

Of course, there had been left-wing criticism of the ideological mix in the peace movement early on, and for many years before the term “antideutsch” was discovered. The publicist and polemicist Wolfgang Pohrt was the first to express it most pointedly, albeit exaggeratedly in places. As early as 1983, he published an article in the magazine *konkret*¹⁷ under the heading *Die Untergangsvision als Stahlbad*.¹⁸ On the one hand, he argued that indulging in visions of the end of the world would make the idea of Germans coming together as a nation acceptable again. On the other hand, conjuring up the threat of a final catastrophe also served to make former leftists at peace with the prevailing conditions, provided that the downfall did not materialize. Bringing things to a head, he describes the peace movement as a “German national revivalist movement.” Due to the early timing of his criticism, many antideutsch later regarded him as a kind of progenitor of their ideas. Pohrt himself left their ranks with his Berlin appearance on October 3, 2003 at the latest. (Wolfgang Pohrt, “Zoff im Altersheim,” in: FAQ, Berlin 2004)

¹⁵ “The Greens.”

¹⁶ Hess was a leading member of the former Nazi Party.

¹⁷ “Concrete,” in the sense of actually existing or tangible.

¹⁸ “The Doomsday Vision as a Healing Bath.”

In a less pointedly polemical manner, many members of left-wing movements attempted to counteract such tendencies and to strengthen decidedly different orientations within or on the fringes of the peace movement. The majority of the left was involved in the movement in some way at the time, apart from the autonomists, who distanced themselves early on and emphasized that they represented an independent “anti-war movement.” The definitive return of the peace movement as a broad mass movement began in 1987, when the dismantling of medium-range missiles began as a result of negotiations between US President Reagan and the new Soviet head of state, Mikhail Gorbachev. As a result, the eco-pacifist movement slipped even further into the realm of diffuse content, as it was deprived of a concrete object of criticism.

In the KB, there was a tendency to focus on the question of the FRG elites’ own ambitions to possess nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. In fact, the question of Germany’s possession of nuclear weapons has been repeatedly raised by certain politicians in the course of post-war history; in particular, these aspirations are associated with the name of Franz-Josef Strauß, who in his lifetime was, among other things, Federal Minister of Atomic Energy and Defense and Bavarian Minister-President. In the 1980s, the ambition to have a technological basis that – under favorable political conditions – would allow the construction of nuclear weapons was linked to the project to build a plutonium factory in Wackersdorf, Bavaria. In 1988/89, members of and people close to the KB initiated a campaign entitled “Atomwaffenverzicht ins Grundgesetz,”¹⁹ which was intended to draw attention to the fact that the Federal Republic had never voluntarily renounced the acquisition of its own NBC²⁰ weapons, but only under pressure from its allies and under certain conditions. The aim was to influence the anti-nuclear and peace movements. Among the most important protagonists of this campaign at this time were Jürgen Elsässer, the left-wing Green member of the Bundestag Thomas Ebermann, and his temporary colleague Matthias Küntzel. At a lecture in Konstanz in spring 1989, Jürgen Elsässer summed up the orientation in the following sentences: “The FRG is not only

¹⁹ “Renouncing nuclear weapons in the [German state’s] Basic Law.”

²⁰ Nuclear, biological, chemical. A term that was later replaced the currently more common CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear) weapons.

a missile launching pad for the superpowers, but is also striving for its own nuclear weapons; it is not only a victim, but also a perpetrator.”

In connection with the murderous Iran-Iraq war, left-wing groups in the peace movement in particular were now working to raise the issue of Germany’s own role as an important arms exporter and supplier to both the Iraqi and Iranian dictatorships. In Hamburg, a “Komitee gegen den iranisch-irakischen Krieg”²¹ was formed, which included Jürgen Reents from the left wing of the Greens (later PDS²²), as well as the Iranian opposition figure Bahman Nirumand. The Marxist economist and journalist Winfried Wolf published his book *Händler des Todes: Bundesdeutsche Rüstungs- und Giftgasexporte im Golfkrieg und nach Libyen*,²³ which compiles some of the key findings on the role of the FRG and was widely received by the left in those years. So there is no need to wait for the later “antideutsch” who portrayed the entire left-wing opposition to the US wars in Iraq (1991 and 2003) as alleged accomplices of the dictatorship there and pretended that only they criticized the crimes of the Iraqi or Iranian regimes. The leftists of the time very clearly named the German suppliers of poison gas factories, without, however, concealing the other sources of arms exports. All major Western industrialized countries supplied both dictatorships with weapons at the same time, among other things to permanently weaken the OPEC cartel of oil-producing countries; with the possible exception of France, which rather “unilaterally” supplied the Iraqi regime in this conflict – which was supported in the name of pro-Western “realpolitik” at the time by the green government aspirant Otto Schily.

Around the same time, at the beginning of 1989, the second military conflict between the USA and Libya occurred, following the bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi in April 1986. This also led to a brief disagreement between the USA and West Germany, as West German companies had built a factory in Rabta, Libya, which the USA suspected of producing chemical weapons. In this situation, a columnist for the *New York Times*, William Safire, a foreign policy firebrand and right-wing conservative who had been a member of US President Richard Nixon’s staff before

²¹ “Committee against the Iran-Iraq War.”

²² Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus. “Party of Democratic Socialism.”

²³ “Merchants of Death: German Arms and Poison Gas Exports in the Gulf War and to Libya.”

1977, coined a phrase that would make him famous around the world: he called the factory where work was allegedly being carried out – with the involvement of German companies – on the production of chemical warfare agents a “Auschwitz-in-the-sand.”

This formula is not only exaggerated, but also wrong on the merits, as no genocide is associated with the Rabta facility. And unlike Iraq, with which both the USA and West Germany were involved in its biological and chemical armament in the mid-1980s, Libya has never used such weapons. Nevertheless, Safire’s formulation also focused understandable indignation in the Jewish community in the USA about the fact that German companies are once again in a position to act as international producers of poison gas. Of course, the NYT columnist had channeled his indignation in this specific case in line with the foreign policy interests of the US elite.

I remember that the slogan of “Auschwitz-in-the-sand” was taken up by some protagonists of the radical left – such as Jürgen Elsässer – in order to formulate a particularly radical-sounding accusation. Overall, however, the KB at the time did not support William Safire’s orientation, but saw the USA and the FRG as “weapons producer versus weapons exporter.” In fact, the US government had just relaunched a program to produce one million poison gas grenades for its own chemical weapons arsenal. But I think that at that time a scheme was launched and partly adopted within the left that could be reactivated and further developed exactly two years later, with the Second Gulf War of 1991. In a situation in which the entire left sought to reorient itself in view of the historical upheavals in Europe and “reunification” and in which parts of it conjured up the danger of a “Fourth Reich,” the schema was able to have an ideologically formative effect. This is where the chain of associations begins that led to the denunciation of “National Socialism in the Middle East.”

In the “Tummult” of Reunification

Parallel to the emerging left-wing criticism of the diffuse peace movement – which was already in a state of disintegration from 1987 – the West German Greens were increasingly being transformed into an adapted bourgeois opposition and future government party. In this situation,

many leftists who adhered to the principle of criticism of society and capitalism and who had previously belonged to different currents and organizations sought a new kind of collection in order to escape the “pull of conformity.” The aim was a loose and dynamic regrouping within the left, which would bring together more intelligent forms of criticism of the existing order, but not bring together orthodox communist or verbally radical sects. In the course of the first half of 1989, a more or less loose alliance was formed under the name “Radikale Linke” (RL).²⁴ Its members included left-wing Greens such as Thomas Ebermann and Jutta Ditfurth from Frankfurt (who gave up their party membership in 1990 and 91 respectively), members of the KB, Winfried Wolf from the “Sozialistische Zeitung” SoZ,²⁵ DKP member Georg Fülberth, critical autonomists, and people from left-wing newspaper projects.

The unifying main point of criticism was the ever-increasing trend towards “modernization opportunities in the system,” to which the “RL” has given the name of “pink-green drunkenness.” In a text *Grundlagen der Radikalen Linken*,²⁶ which was developed over the course of several meetings, it was stated that capitalism in Germany was striving to “modernize itself by adding a few environmental technologies to its export range, providing a few career positions for women, and attesting to its capacity for peace.” Unlike in the earlier modernization phase in the early 1970s, however, this was happening while the prevailing social and economic system was “not offering any reforms in the social sphere, but was instead going on a deregulation offensive to roll back many of the reforms that it once ... had to grant.” The declaration also deals with the emergence of German right-wing extremism in the form of the REP party,²⁷ which at times went from election success to election success that year.

But a few months later, the ranks of the RL were no longer talking about “red-green drunkenness”²⁸ as the main evil, but about “national frenzy.” In November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, and its ruins also affected those on the left who had never been enthusiastic about “actually existing

²⁴ “Radical Left.”

²⁵ “Socialist Newspaper.”

²⁶ “Foundations of the Radical Left.”

²⁷ Die Republikaner. “The Republicans,” a nationalist conservative party.

²⁸ The author originally used both “red-green” and “pink-green” drunkenness.

socialism,” let alone the GDR regime. In December of the same year, Chancellor Helmut Kohl publishes his “Ten-Point Plan” for the state merger of the (absorbing) FRG and (to be swallowed) GDR. In West Germany, public opinion is not openly against “reunification,” as this historically represents an official ideal of legitimacy of the state that no major force opposes. Nevertheless, the majority is skeptical and wait-and-see, because: “What else will it cost us?” The majority of the GDR population, on the other hand, is euphoric about the prospect of adopting the “hard Deutschmark,” in contrast to those who were the first to take to the streets as an opposition movement. Street demonstrations in some places became increasingly aggressive, urging the rapid removal of all obstacles on the road to unification. In March 1990, Kohl supporters won a majority in the first and last democratically elected Volkskammer²⁹ of the GDR.

In this situation, the driving forces within the “RL” saw themselves as a kind of “pillar of strength.” In general, the left, which was critical of capitalism, was predominantly negative about the process that was actually taking place – apart from a section of the then SED-PDS³⁰ (and later PDS), which was above all striving to carry over at least remnants of its ancestral positions into the future “reunified” Germany. However, within the Left, which had no tradition as a state and governing party and was not committed to unconditional “constructiveness,” two fundamental attitudes coexisted. One position deplored the form that the unification process was taking, as the pure incorporation of the GDR by the expanding Federal Republic, instead of drawing up a new constitution for the “common state.” It rejected the socio-political goals given to it. A triumphant advance of the corporations was noted, which now wanted to turn the former GDR into a cheap labor pool and sales market and destroy the existing economy. “Mezzogiorno³¹ in East Germany” was a much-used term at the time. The “end of the command economy” in real socialism, which was constantly celebrated in bourgeois discourse, was described as the beginning of a new economic dictate through corporate structures and unemployment

²⁹“People’s Chamber.” The legislative body.

³⁰ Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands. “Socialist Unity Party of Germany,” the founding and ruling party of the GDR.

³¹ Italian for “Southern Italy.”

In contrast, the other principled stance was to reject the unification process as such and to argue that a “better reunification” was not conceivable and/or desirable. The aspect of capitalism, which presented itself as the victor of history and whose protagonists would now expand their economic power unchecked, was not disputed. However, the essence of the historical event did not lie in naming the “class interest” of the economic ruling class, but in the fact that all other social classes agreed to the unification process. It was scandalized that precisely no social interest contrary to capital was articulated. The dynamics of German nationalism in particular were essentially regarded as the cross-class cement. Critics described the word “re-” in the dominant discourse of “reunification” as a particularly cautionary note, as it implied the intention of restoring the conditions that existed between 1871 and 1945. With this in mind, the RL organized a demonstration entitled “Nie wieder Deutschland”³² in Frankfurt am Main on May 12th, 1990, which was attended by 15 to 20,000 people from quite different parts of the left-wing spectrum.

In the previously cited article *Weshalb die Linke anti-deutsch sein muß*, its author justifies his position as follows:

The left treats the topic of “reunification” with a dangerous trivialization, as if it were simply about the expansion of the market economy to the east. ... This view only captures a section of reality and abstracts from the “German specificity” of the events.

This is why “a critique of the capital-conformist reorganization of the economies of Eastern Europe ... is indeed indispensable,” but it remains “blunt” and must “be supplemented by an explicitly anti-nationalist and thus antideutsch view.” This in turn finds its foundation “in the historical course of class struggles in this country.”

Elsässer raises the question: “What makes it so easy for the German ruling class to this day to bind the oppressed to their goals via nationalism?” He provides a sketchy answer to this question, referring to a “social psychological approach ... that is materialistically based.” It contains

³²“Germany: never again.”

the reference: “The nation state was – in contrast to the bourgeois-democratic processes in France and England – not fought for by the people, but enforced from above with blood and iron.” However, this also points to the different history and formation of the bourgeoisie, the economically dominant class: while in France, for example, it shook off the outdated shells of aristocratic rule and monarchy and thus rose to become the leading political and economic force in the nation state, in Germany, on the other hand, it took refuge as a predominantly economically active bourgeoisie under the wing of the Prussian “nobleman’s state” – at least after the attempt at a bourgeois revolution in Germany in 1848/49 had failed and been bloodily crushed. In fact, this led to the birth of German “national liberalism,” about which Franz Neumann wrote in his work on the Nazi state *Behemoth* that it had provided the essential backbone of the “Alldeutschen Verbands,”³³ which he in turn qualified as the “immediate ideological precursor of the National Socialist Party.”

Elsässer further wrote in his article:

The replacement of the Prussian nobleman’s state and the replacement of fascism – the German people did not achieve either on their own, but only as a result of lost wars. This cruel lesson from the class struggles, that resistance was not worthwhile, ... has become deeply engraved in the German psyche.

It follows that “the mass base for aggressive racist and nationalist politics is larger in this country than in comparable industrialized countries.” The AK author also speaks of “old and possible new fascism” and finally paints the “perspective of a Fourth Reich” on the wall with agitational intent.

The declaration sparked a fierce controversy in the ranks of the KB, just as the entire left was shaken and rattled by debates, (self-)doubts and a search for orientation in those days. The then AK editor Knut Mellenthin, now an author at *junge Welt*, rejected the proposed “anti-nationalist and antideutsch orientation.” He argues: “The decisive takeover process

³³“All-German Association”

(of the GDR or Eastern Europe) takes place in the economy.” Running a “primarily ideological campaign against German nationalism” is nonsensical – since such an orientation “like a call ‘down with the fever!’ to fight the flu” only addresses symptoms related to the collapse of the former real-socialist social system. Furthermore, it blurs social interests in a “painfully superficial painting of ‘the’ Germans.”

The dispute escalated at a nationwide KB discussion conference in Hamburg in mid-January 1990. The supporters of the “antideutsch” declaration found themselves in the minority and consequently formed the “KB minority faction” in the coming weeks. In addition to Elsässer, its heads include *konkret* author Detlef zum Winkel, the then outgoing AK editor Heiner Möller, and Matthias Küntzel. Incidentally, Knut Mellenthin’s criticism that with an orientation like theirs, the minority faction might as well emigrate to the Bahamas, as they had given up hope of any social change in German-speaking countries, resulted in the – ironically meant – naming of their periodical, which appeared from 1992 onwards. Today, only the title remains, while the original content has changed considerably. The publication of a “Statement by the *Bahamas* Editorial Team” congratulating *Bush – the Man of Peace!* on the victory in his war, which had just been declared over, as of April 2003, would have been unthinkable in 1992.

My Look Back

And the author of these lines? Back then, I took part in the nationwide discussion meeting – which I remember all the better because it was right in the middle of my written Abitur³⁴ exams. I strongly supported the statement *Weshalb die Linke...*³⁵ This was because, in my opinion, it was based on a more complete and meaningful understanding of social dynamics than the vulgar Marxist logic spread by “orthodox” groups at the same time, which understood the unification process of the FRG and GDR merely as an outgrowth of ruling class interests and corporate strategies. In my opinion, the latter was not in a position to recognize and deal with the mass approval of the “reunification” demand, unless it

³⁴ Secondary school matriculation exams.

³⁵ The author wrote “Warum die Linke” but almost certainly meant “Weshalb die Linke.” We have corrected this, but are noting it explicitly here.

regarded the majority population of the still-GDR as merely a “manipulated mass” and thus reduced it to a passive quantity. Furthermore, the core of an analysis of fascism seemed important to me, which took into account the existence of a mass movement or dynamic and did not reduce fascist or National Socialist rule to a mere “from above” dictatorship.

Incidentally, this point of view is linked to a discussion we had had in the previous 12 months regarding the far-right’s election successes in 1989. At that time, on the one hand, there was the widely developed thesis of the “protest voter” in the bourgeois media. On the other hand, on the part of the KB or RL members involved in antifa work, we tended to emphasize that there was actual racist potential in society.

The — essentially correct — realization that there is no simple and open dichotomy between rulers and ruled in German society, but that the latter are more or less involved in an ideological consensus, was the starting point of the “antinational” debate. This is essentially true, but on closer analysis it can be applied to almost all historically formed social orders — at least those that have remained stable over a longer period of time. For the difference in interests between the rulers and the ruled only comes to light as such, naked and unvarnished, at decisive historical moments, for example when revolutionary ruptures occur. Nevertheless, even in non-crisis times there is a (sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker) veiled awareness — one could also say: an inkling — of the existence of domination and exploitation, and of the associated fundamental differences in interests. In France, where situations similar to general strikes or at least broad social conflicts across various sectors of society occur every ten years or so (such as in 1968, 1973, 1986, 1995 or 2003), this “suspicion” emerges in a completely different way than in the Federal Republic of Germany. These different ways of integrating social contradictions or allowing them to partially clash are linked to the different social and ideological histories of the two countries. Of course, it is not only the power of “German ideology” that comes to mind, but also the very different ways in which the fundamental social conflict of interests is channeled via sometimes more, sometimes less institutionalized trade unions and other “flash-backs” tied to the state. What is certain is that moments of open manifestation of fundamental social contradictions

occur much less frequently in Germany than in comparable capitalist countries.

A central political statement for the early anti-nationals or antideutsch followed from this dual observation that in the FRG the (ideologized) consensus prevailed over the social conflict and that the majority of the GDR population at the time supported or even demanded the “affiliation” to this state. It was that talk of the “Volksgemeinschaft”³⁶ in Germany was not just an ideological, illusion-creating slogan of the Nazis, but had actually taken on social form and manifest violence for historical reasons. For this reason, other left-wing movements were quick to accuse the Nazis of sharing their basic views and merely reversing the signs, i.e. engaging in “negative nationalism.”

Otherwise, this conception of the social or rather “national consensus” in Germany was an early starting point for the reception of critical theory. One of its basic assumptions was that the formation of social consensus, which was mediated by the pressure of the collective on the individual to join the “general goals,” was one of the most important instruments of power. For some sections of the left, who until then had mainly emphasized the aspect of repression by the rulers and their state apparatus, this represented a paradigm shift, indeed a kind of Copernican revolution.

In that initial phase, in which the protagonists were not yet concerned with the flat advocacy of the postulates of “Freedom & Democracy,” but with a critique of mass sentiment/agreement in times of “reunification,” I found the initial considerations described interesting and worth considering. They seemed to me to be a necessary counterweight to the vulgar Marxism that perceives the parts of the population that do not belong to the economic elite primarily as “victims” dominated by someone else’s will and neglects their willingness to consent.

Nevertheless, in retrospect, I believe that our position in 1990 was clearly reductionist, even if it was able to correct some of the shortcomings and gaps in the theses disseminated elsewhere. It emphasized too much the mass appeal of ideology, specifically German nationalism, and regarded it as the main driving force behind the desire for reunification. In fact, it

³⁶“National community,” but with strong National Socialist undertones.

was neglected that the mobilization of a not inconsiderable part of the still-GDR population was primarily driven by a strong economic motor, whereby the pursuit of economic interests found a suitable ideological disguise. One of the most popular slogans during that period in the former GDR was: “If the Deutschmark comes, we’ll stay – if it doesn’t, we’ll go to it.” The hard currency of the West German state was certainly a much more attractive argument in the eyes of a large proportion of the citizens of the former GDR than the higher consecration of the “sacred values of a German nation” alone could have been. Those striving for the supposedly beckoning prosperity certainly also took advantage of the inclusion and exclusion mechanism inherent in nation states: after all, the expected “entry into the paradise of prosperity” was to be reserved for them, while the possibility of joining the FRG was not intended for Poles, Czechs or Romanians.

In the antideutsch and anti-national discourse, too little consideration was also given to the fact that the dominant ideology in society also underwent some changes, especially in the decades after the Second World War. A primordial basis of “German ideology,” namely in the form of the communal character of society and the widespread rejection of (consistent) class struggle as a “threat to the greater whole,” has certainly remained. The form in which it continues to have an effect will probably have to be seen, especially in the social crisis. Nevertheless, further layers of German social history were added after 1945, which in turn influenced and shaped the ideological foundation: the experience of the “economic miracle,” which followed only a short time after that of the “collapse” at the end of the 1940s / beginning of the 1950s, should not be neglected.

Certainly, both ideological sedimentary layers overlap in the collective memory, that of the “Volksgemeinschaft” before 1945 and that of the “economic miracle,” with anti-communism surviving as an important foundation. After all, the Nazis had made *tabula rasa* with the consistently oppositional parts of the workers’ movement. However, the post-war period left its own ideological imprint. The strong fixation on the unconditional preservation of prosperity and the associated, almost obsessive striving for social stability is the first thing that catches the eye here: a deep-rooted fear of inflation (remembering 1923 and 1948),

which was much stronger than in neighboring countries, where the money was printed without hesitation in the course of social conflicts over the distribution of society's surplus product; the for an ultra-stable political system, which had remained immobile for almost 30 years until the emergence of the Greens; a widespread rejection among the political class of all elements of direct democracy, which were seen as potentially endangering stability and conjuring up the ghosts of the Weimar Republic; and a certain form of (national) pacifism, which never again wanted to see the fruits of its own prosperity jeopardized by war or other political, collective "adventures," also forms a perceptible ideological expression to this day. Many an expression of social rejection of military interventions, the risks and results of which appear uncertain, is linked to this; this also results in the character of certain parts of the German peace movement, which is predominantly centered on the German nation as "victim."

The "antinational" or rather "antideutsch" politics and ideology largely failed to recognize this mixture of ruptures and continuities in its initial phase. Instead, the focus was primarily on the element of claimed direct continuity with historical forms of German nationalism: forecast of the "Fourth Reich" (even if in an agitational manner), expected warlike and other escalations (for example in eastern Europe after the Soviet Union withdrew to its borders), escalating racist mobilization against immigrants... This also resulted in harsh rhetoric that was more gesticulating than effective, which sometimes painted over its own political impotence with screamingly radical phrases: "Bomber Harris, do it again!"³⁷

Racism and the Asylum Debate

Between 1991 and 1994, some developments even seemed to prove right the alarmist diagnosis and prognosis, which was fixated on a supposed repetition of historical phenomena. After the first social upheavals as a result of "reunification" made themselves felt in East Germany from the summer of 1991, almost the entire political class and all major media outlets discovered and pushed one topic in unison: the *asylum de-*

³⁷ A reference to Arthur Harris, the British RAF commander responsible for the mass bombing of German cities during WWII. The antideutsch invoke(d) his name to irritate their fascist and nationalist opponents.

bate. For months, you literally could not open a newspaper — apart from left-wing alternative or radical left-wing media — without finding the all-dominant topic “the uncontrolled influx of asylum seekers and the reactions” spread over several pages. In September 1991, the situation escalated after all non-European immigrants (asylum seekers and former GDR contract workers from Mozambique) were driven out of the Saxon town of Hoyerswerda by a mob carrying out arson attacks. In the same days, the then CDU Secretary General Volker R  he sent his letter to all local and district associations of his party, in which they were asked to systematically raise questions about the “costs of asylum seekers” in all municipal, city and district parliaments and to carry out a general staff campaign against the presence of such people. For months, the politicians of the established parties outdid each other with infamous advances and inventions: Munich’s mayor Georg Kronawitter (formerly SPD), for example, fantasized in March 1992 that there might be “900 Gaddafi mercenaries” among the African asylum seekers in his city. After the tall tale made the rounds of several tabloid newspapers, it was never heard of again. The leader of the NRW³⁸ SPD parliamentary group in the state parliament, Friedhelm Farthmann, publicly made the following suggestion for dealing with asylum seekers, reminiscent of manslaughter demands: “Pick them up by the scruff of the neck, make short work of them and get them out!” And parallel to the opening of the floodgates for racist discourse by almost all established political forces, there was an unprecedented wave of violence: almost night after night, asylum seekers’ homes or “foreigner” apartments burned down somewhere in the enlarged FRG. The perpetrators were sometimes organized neo-fascists, but often also unorganized, incited youths. Organized right-wing extremism gained momentum again. In state elections in Baden-W  rttemberg in April 1992, the “Republicans” and DVU³⁹ together received 13 percent. However, right-wing extremism did not really dominate the scene, but was itself swept to the top by the actions of the established, state-supporting parties.

In this situation, the prediction of an accelerated transition to forms of rule with partly fascist characteristics and a reactionary mass mobiliza-

³⁸ Nordrhein-Westfalen, a large and populous state in the west of Germany.

³⁹ Deutsche Volksunion. “German People’s Union,” a far-right nationalist party.

tion seemed to come true. After all, the “alliance of mob and elite” diagnosed by anti-nationalists was actually at work. But after the results of this racist wave began to become counterproductive, after the alarmed headlines began to accumulate in other Western countries, and the historically formed image of the “ugly German” threatened to spread again, the political and media elites of West Germany applied the brakes – after more than a year, of course. The state itself set the goal of the successful campaign: on May 26th, 1993, the Bundestag passed the de facto far-reaching annulment of the right to asylum in Article 16 of the Basic Law, with votes from the CDU/CSU, FPD,⁴⁰ and a significant part of the SPD. However, it then curbed the mobilization of the racist “base,” which had taken on a life of its own.

The racist asylum debate had taken on a life of its own. Three days after the Bundestag resolution, right-wing extremist perpetrators set fire to an apartment, whereupon five Turkish women died in the flames. This time, the victims were not asylum seekers, but were part of the established immigrant population. The Turkish government intervened to demand better protection for its nationals, and the international press reported extensively on the Solingen fire. As a result, for the first time in a long time, there was significant repression against neo-Nazi structures. In the media, warnings about the “flood of asylum seekers” were replaced by warnings about “xenophobia.” Finally, the state apparatus sent a clear message to members of far-right parties, in particular the previously successful “Republikaner.” In almost all federal states, the REP party was now placed under observation by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution after years of a subtle division between “right-wing extremist” forces to be observed and merely “radical right-wing” forces that were not (yet) to be observed. In Germany, inclusion in the publicly accessible reports represented an extraordinary opportunity to stigmatize forces that are not compatible with the state, which has no equivalent in neighbouring countries. Above all, however, it is linked to the possibility of imposing occupational bans on public servants and civil servants who belong to the organizations in question. This threat was clearly signaled to civil servants among the members of the REPs from 1994 onwards. As a result, the rise of the “Republicans” was inter-

⁴⁰ Freie Demokratische Partei. “Free Democratic Party,” a neoliberal party.

rupted and they fell below the five percent threshold again in the 1994 European Parliament and Bundestag elections. In December of the same year, they saw off their success-accustomed leader Franz Schönhuber as “too extremist,” who then split off with a few loyal supporters.

In the end, contrary to some predictions, the development of the early 1990s did not break the path of the bourgeois-democratic system of “western” character – but it was ultimately channeled after the racist terror had been unleashed for one to two years and had encountered surprisingly little resistance. The result was a much stronger sealing off of the FRG against the entry of politically persecuted people and against the feared “rush of global poverty,” with the restrictive amendment of Article 16 of the Basic Law. However, this was not a specifically German phenomenon, because in the same year, for example, the right to asylum was also partially dismantled in France under the then national-conservative interior minister Charles Pasqua. It would therefore be necessary to distinguish very precisely what part specific moments, borrowed from the history of German ideology, play in the functioning of existing society, and to what extent the FRG functions like any other highly developed capitalist industrial state under the conditions of imperialism – i.e. with a relatively strong social consensus, which is linked, among other things, to the existence of significant material distribution potentials, as well as racist mechanisms aimed at defending this social wealth from the outside. A differentiated answer would probably contain something of both elements.

The 1991 War Debate: Will the Fourth Reich Take a Detour via Baghdad?

A section of the left had only just plunged into the orientation debate and crisis in connection with the “reunification” when the next global political event was already on the agenda. Even before October 3rd, 1990, when the unification of the FRG and GDR was sealed, the shockwaves of international tensions reached us. On August 2nd, 1990, the Iraqi army had overrun the small but oil-rich neighboring state of Kuwait.

The Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had probably initially counted on the benevolent neutrality of the USA, which had supplied him – alongside

other major powers, including France and the FRG – with state-of-the-art weapons in the 1980s and had previously encouraged him to invade Iran. “We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait,” declared the US ambassador in Baghdad, April Glaspie, during her meeting with the Iraqi president on July 25th, 1990. A week later, the tanks rolled. But the actual reaction of the USA was not long in coming: in that very month of August, they initiated a gigantic troop deployment in the Persian Gulf and threatened Iraq with war. It is not unreasonable to assume that the US administration had seized this extremely favorable opportunity to lend material force to the reorientation of Western military doctrine (away from the East and towards a future enemy from the “south”). A few weeks earlier, on June 21th, 1990, the then NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner had given a lecture at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) in Paris. In it, the German CDU politician and former Federal Minister of Defense stated, among other things, that NATO had to be ready for “new military issues arising from the development of the Third World” after the end of the Cold War with the Soviet bloc. Particularly in the Middle East and the Mediterranean region, there were “increased risks outside of Europe ... whose development directly affected Europe’s security.”

The course of events at the time is well known, in particular the six-week bombardment of Iraq from January 17th to February 28th, 1991, which claimed around 150,000 lives and was followed by uprisings in Iraq. The revolting sections of the population, particularly in Kurdish northern Iraq and Shiite southern Iraq, were relying on the USA and its Gulf War allies to help them. However, in the post-war days, the US administration decided that such an uncontrolled development in Iraq was undesirable and gave the Iraqi repressive forces a free hand; despite a ban on flights by the allies, their attack helicopters were sometimes able to take off and land directly next to US radar installations. During these phases, again at least 150,000 Iraqis died in the bloodbath caused by the regime. However, the strategic decision taken by George Bush Sr. at the time not to march on to Baghdad and to maintain the regime as a controlling factor has been engraved in the memory of a section of the US right in ideological form. According to this, it was supposedly a result of the weakness of US policy, i.e. a flaw that needed to be wiped out. This

ideologically underpinned assumption became an axiom of one wing of the US Republican party. This is one of the reasons why part of the ruling elite in Washington under Bush Jr. was in a hurry after, and probably even before, September 11th, 2001, to settle accounts with the Iraqi regime – which had nothing to do with the attacks.

In the first days of the war, the Iraqi regime responded to the air attacks by firing several volleys of Scud missiles at Saudi Arabia and Israel, among others. Mainly for propaganda reasons and in the hope of winning over the “Arab street” or other regimes to his side, Saddam Hussein intensified his threats against Israel; at their peak, he threatened to equip the next missiles with poison gas warheads. In reality, however, he did not appear to have the military means to do so, as the extension of the range of the original Soviet-designed Scud short-range missiles – a product of the German Thyssen company – had come at the expense of their carrier capacities. Nevertheless, many people in Israel spent anxious days and nights in shelters wearing gas masks, although the authorities had not issued gas masks to the Palestinian population (some of whom then cheered on the Scuds flying into Israel).

In this situation, the historical image of “Auschwitz-in-the-sand,” which had been mentioned in the Libyan context in 1989, was reactivated. In Israel, protest demonstrations took place against the German poison gas suppliers, which – in a country where many Holocaust survivors also live – necessarily argued with powerful historical images and accusations. A left in Germany, which had just warned of German nationalism and the return of its dangers, was necessarily sensitive to this. However, this debate was also taken up and instrumentalized in Germany by sections of the political class and media. The old left-wing critical concept of the “dealers of death” was now suddenly also being used by conformist, statist press organs and politicians with denunciatory intent. In their portrayal, however, these were “black sheep” who urgently needed to be called to account – while in reality the suppliers of the poison gas facilities were industry giants and very often also companies based in the Federal Republic, such as Preussag AG and its subsidiary WET, which had helped build poison gas facilities, and the Munich-based armaments manufacturer Messerschmidt-Bölkow-Blohm. The Iraqi army had purchased some of its attack helicopters and fighter jets from MBB,

which had possibly flown chemical weapons missions against Kurds, and the Bundeswehr University in Munich had trained the pilots. However, this involvement of leading corporations and the German state was lost in the media concert, which instead sought to promote one message above all: reparation is now needed — both reparation for the historical crimes committed against Jews and reparation for the actions of the alleged “black sheep of the German economy.” But how? By increasing the FRG’s military involvement in the conflict! Some overzealous participants in the discussion wanted to send the German army to Israel right away — as suggested by the Mayor of Wiesbaden, Achim Exner. The SPD politician found support for this from the *taz*⁴¹ editor Klaus-Peter Klingelschmitt, at the time one of the most important mouthpieces of the “realpolitik” wing of the Greens, and Joschka Fischer, who was just beginning to look for occasions to bid farewell to pacifism. In this context, the German army general Reinhard Schmückle, a companion of the former West German right-wing leader Franz-Josef Strauß, described the German military presence in Turkey as “practical mourning work and coming to terms with the past” because it was of benefit to Israel.

From the Gulf War Debate to the Antisemitism Debate

Freshly unsettled by the upheavals in Europe and in the midst of historical-ideological paradigm shifts, the radical left was once again shaken up in 1990/91 by the immediate succession of “reunification” and the Gulf War. This is why the overloading of the German Gulf War debate with historical images and the drawing of parallels, for example to the Second World War, which was particularly common in Germany, necessarily had a severe impact on the left.

The debate is also raging in the bourgeois feuilleton. In an essay in *SPIEGEL* in early February 1991, the former left-wing writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger compared Saddam Hussein with Adolf Hitler and the Iraqi masses (who wanted to sacrifice themselves for their “leader” in “death wish”) with the Germans. In the same week, the singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann, who had been expatriated from the GDR a decade and a half earlier, wrote in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* (under the title: *Damit wir*

⁴¹ Die Tageszeitung. “The Daily Newspaper,” a rather left-leaning publication.

*uns richtig mißverstehen: Ich bin für diesen Krieg am Golf*⁴²) raises the rhetorical question: “Should we let a Hitler do it?” In 1941, “the American Nazis and the CP⁴³ of the USA” were against the war, and a similar alliance exists “even today.” Yet it is obvious: “What Hitler had his people practice in years of bloody manual labor: the extermination of the Jewish people, Saddam Hussein will now try to do at the push of a button.” Biermann recalls Goebbels’ “Wollt ihr den totalen Krieg”⁴⁴ speech in the Berlin Sportpalast and immediately follows it up: “But whoever asks me today: ‘Do you want total peace’ — To them I say: ‘No thank you.’”

Part of the radical left, for its part, is caught up in this urge to interpret the war events in the Gulf in the light of National Socialism and the Second World War. Several motivations, some strategic and some emotional, are intertwined. On the one hand, there is the absolute desire not to repeat the pattern of the old peace movement which above all meant to blame the USA (and at best the FRG as its accomplice), but to focus the criticism clearly on German policy alone. On the other hand, it is the indignation about the German companies producing and exporting poison gas production facilities (such as Tabun and Sarin) and about the German aid for the armament of Iraq with chemical weapons, whereby a connection is made to the memory of German companies supplying Zyklon B. However, the equipment aid provided by the USA, for example, in the same sectors is completely swept under the carpet, as is the fact that the arms aid provided by the FRG to Iraq during the 1980s was not given so that it could attack Israel, but as part of its war with Iran. The context provided the opportunity to link German arms export policy directly with the history of the Nazi regime, the criticism of the failures of the left during the “old” peace movement of the 1980s with the previous theoretical inadequacies regarding the antisemitic element of National Socialism.

In fact, for a long time, the left paid only very little attention to this aspect, instead perceiving the Nazi state as more or less “normal” imperialism — which waged wars of conquest and repressively held down its opponents. The mass approval of an antisemitic discourse in the first

⁴²“So that we misunderstand each other correctly: I am in favor of this war in the Gulf.”

⁴³ Communist Party

⁴⁴“Do you want total war?”

half of the 20th century and its implied intentions of annihilation were largely neglected. Now, especially that part of the left that sees aspects of German history returning in the context of the Iraq crisis is taking the reactions of other left-wing circles — above all the more “traditional” anti-imperialists — as an opportunity to accuse them of such omissions. The polemic about “left-wing antisemitism” flares up. For some protagonists, the latter is the explanation for why other leftists are indifferent to Saddam Hussein’s threats against Israel — indeed, some of them consider it to be the main cause of left-wing opposition to the war in Iraq in the first place or subsequently declare it to be so.

In fact, antisemitism tended to be a blind spot in significant parts of the German left at the time, at least insofar as it was not about the antisemitic character of the Nazis. The idea that left-wing and antisemitic ideas could have anything to do with each other was categorically ruled out by many of their supporters: “We can’t have anything to do with antisemitism, otherwise we would be right-wingers or right-wing extremists.” This overlooks a very important point, namely that the historical left has had at least one flank open to antisemitism throughout various historical periods. This has to do with its nature: unlike racism directed against immigrant workers, for example, which is fairly easy to recognize as reactionary, antisemitism (as an underpinning of world conspiracy theories that seek to expose a supposedly hidden rule operating in secret) often comes to light in the guise of a — subjectively understood as such — rebellion against power and money. The early French socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, for example, was clearly antisemitic.

The flare-up of the debate about “left antisemitism” in 1991 therefore touched on a real sore point. At the same time, however, the conditions for clarification in a positive sense — in the sense of a sharper distinction between left-wing and potentially antisemitic ideas or affects — were decidedly unfavorable. Instead of a fundamental debate on the ideological foundations, nature and meaning of antisemitism, the polemic served above all to create a hectic demarcation under the pressure of the (war) events. Terms were not clarified and dividing lines were hastily drawn, which were to have considerable repercussions over the next 15 years. Above all, however, several different debates became entangled.

On the one hand, there was the question of the significance of antisemitism, the mass approval of National Socialism and the resulting consequences for the political left. The “anti-national” or “antideutsch” question can be understood as follows: is the “Volksgemeinschaft” an illusory slogan or a (partial) socially established reality? This is followed by the determination of a – total or non-total – ideological continuity of society since the Nazi era.

Secondly, a certain type of anti-imperialism had reached a dead end: in its simplest variant, oriented towards a binary contradiction “North/South equals oppressor/oppressed,” it had admittedly already fallen into crisis from 1979, as a result of the experiences in quick succession with the – initially welcomed by some short-sighted left-wing anti-imperialists – regimes of Pol Pot and Khomenei. But the applause of the most stupid or dogmatic among the German “anti-imps” (and other Western counterparts) for Saddam Hussein as “challenger of the USA” showed that there were still remnants of the Manichean ideology. At the same time, it was already apparent in 1991 that an (initially small) part of the radical left was in the process of completely throwing overboard previously shared insights about imperialism, the international division of labor, and the “North-South conflict.” The political impossibility of supporting the Iraqi regime as such against the “West” was to be taken by some as an opportunity to definitely throw the baby out with the bathwater.

And thirdly, there was the problem of the position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this context, the KB, from which many of the “antinationalists” emerged, had already clearly distinguished itself in 1988/89 from the “maximalist” positions of the Palestine supporters from the anti-imp spectrum, who regarded Israel as an “illegitimate” state and society, as an “artificial entity and imperialist brood head in the Arab world.” An important book published by KB in 1988 entitled *Ein unvermeidlicher Streit. Deutsche Linke zwischen Israel und Palästina*.⁴⁵ It criticizes above all the positions of autonomous and anti-Israel oriented Palestine solidarity groups. The withdrawal of the KB from the “Aktionsbündnis Palästina 1988”⁴⁶ and from the preparation of a demonstration – which had caused the long-simmering dispute to erupt – is justified, among other things,

⁴⁵“An Unavoidable Fight. The German Left Between Israel and Palestine.”

⁴⁶“Action Alliance Palestine 1988.”

by the fact “that the right to self-determination of the Jewish people is either flatly denied by Israel in the action alliance, or that one is of the opinion that there is no need to worry about this point.” It also states:

Ultimately, the Palestinians cannot achieve their national and social liberation against the Jewish people of Israel, but only together with them. ... From our point of view, the main alternative, namely reliance on the alliance with allegedly “anti-imperialist” regimes such as those of Syria and Libya or even Iran, can only lead to negative results.

Criticism of the anti-immigration romantics who thought in terms of supposedly homogeneous and heroic “struggling peoples” had already existed within the radical left before the “upheaval” from 1989 to 1991. But even at this point, some currents were now ready to throw the baby out with the bathwater⁴⁷ and make any discussion of the real oppression of the Palestinian population taboo. The “Initiative Sozialistisches Forum”⁴⁸ (ISF) in Freiburg, for example, was already one of the critics of anti-imp Palestine solidarity and its oversimplifications in the 1980s. An ISF statement from March 1988, which is also quoted in the book *Ein notwendiger Streit*, begins as follows: “Solidarity with the uprising of the Palestinians against the military dictatorship in the territories occupied by Israel” — at that time, 1988, the state of Israel still administered them directly — “as well as solidarity with the protest of Israelis of Palestinian origin against their discrimination are a necessity of left internationalism.” However, it caused strange flowerings among German leftists. This is followed by a criticism of the “antisemitic feelings and intentions” that are spread “under the slogan of anti-Zionism,” and this “less for the sake of the Palestinians” than because of their own ideological needs. Today, however, the quoted sentences would undoubtedly be denounced as “antisemitic” by the ISF’s chief thinker Joachim Bruhn, as he postulated in 2003: “Any criticism of the state of Israel is antisemitic.” The suspicion is well-founded that it is not the course of reality in the world that

⁴⁷ We would like to point out that the author used the German equivalent of this idiom twice in short succession and not that we have lazily translated.

⁴⁸ “Initiative Socialist Forum.”

explains such shifts in position over a period of 15 years – but the momentum of sectarian circles developing in hermetically sealed orbits.

The former KB minority and now “Gruppe K”⁴⁹ was also hit hard by this polemic back in 1991. During the Gulf War, different sensitivities were to be found in their ranks. Matthias Küntzel, for example, emphasized that it was the war policy of the USA that had led to the escalation of the war in the Gulf and that it could therefore not be excluded from the central criticism. At the same time, in several AK articles, Küntzel sharply criticized German ambitions to participate in the war and to overcome the existing thresholds for worldwide deployments of the Bundeswehr. In February 1991, he wrote in AK about the German debate on whether increased military involvement on behalf of Israel was necessary or legitimate:

It goes without saying that the special German responsibility towards the Jewish population should not be cynically denied in favour of anti-war agitation ... On the other hand, it is no less necessary to reject any instrumentalization of this responsibility in favour of the criminal bombing of Iraq.

In this context, he rejected the comparison between Nazi Germany and Iraq:

The absurdity of the comparison arises, among other things, from the fact that Hitler did not lead a developing country, but an imperialist core power with the corresponding economic power and the ability to wage world war. Its not unwelcome side effect lies in the historical revisionist relativization of German fascism ... When Germany goes to war, it does not want to stand aside, but to get involved. What was set in motion in 1914 against the “Russian despotism” has found its “Hitler Hussein” today.

At the other end of the small grouping, Detlef zum Winkel, who became known primarily as an author of *konkret*, spoke out in favor of a different

⁴⁹“Group C(ommunist).”

position. Detlef zum Winkel had presented the deployment in the Gulf as a new stage of imperialist policy worth fighting in several issues of *konkret* during the months of preparation for war. After the outbreak of war and in the weeks shortly after the Gulf War he focused on the Iraqi missile and chemical weapons threats against Israel and the German involvement in the previous armament of Iraq. During the weeks of the war, he maintained a certain degree of hardline support for the attacks on Iraq without, however, clearly affirming them — in a sense, he flirted with this in order to be able to criticize reactions worthy of criticism (insensitivity towards the threatened Jewish population or trivialization of Saddam's regime) with supposedly appropriate sharpness. Somewhat later, he again distanced himself from war advocacy, for example in the Gulf War review *Herr P. und die Bombe. Der Krieg der Polemiker*.⁵⁰ Jürgen Elsässer occupied a middle position between the two in the Gulf War dispute: although he clearly identified himself as an opponent of the war at all times, he also called for a strategic orientation of his own criticism, which was aimed much more strongly at the FRG (both because of its ambitions to expand the deployment radius of the Bundeswehr and because of the NBC weapons aid for Iraq). Matthias Küntzel's criticism was, in his opinion, still too strongly focused on the USA.

In the early summer of 1991, there was also a break within the former “antinational” KB minority, as there had been two to three months earlier in the Radikale Linke, which had effectively ceased to exist since the end of the Gulf War. At a discussion conference in May or June 1991, Matthias Küntzel posed the question to Detlef zum Winkel, who warned of anti-Semitic ideology in Arab regimes in connection with the Gulf War aftermath: “How many more Arab countries do you want to bomb [with this justification]?” To which the interviewee replied: “That’s the point.”

In October 1995, the “Group K” also announced its dissolution, i.e. its splitting into a Berlin core group, which wanted to continue the former joint group magazine *Bahamas*, and at least two Hamburg-based groups. The declaration of dissolution stated, among other things, “that a communist policy other than that of substantive intervention is currently

⁵⁰“Mr. P. and the Bomb. The war of the polemicists.”

not possible and meaningful,” i.e. the possibility of social practice does not exist. One of the Hamburg groups that remained behind, from which the “Gruppe Demontage”⁵¹ later emerged with several publications on international topics (including “Postfordist Guerrillas”), criticized in a paper, among other things: “Our critique of the völkish [ideology] suggests an examination of migrant groups and women’s groups,” but this has hardly been done. Also, “the consideration of völkisch ideology formation remains insufficient as long as its differentiation according to class lines and contradictions is not examined.” The question is raised: “What can we as the metropolitan left contribute to an anti-national internationalism?” The group turned more towards cooperation with the radical left, autonomous or critical internationalist spectrum. Even back then, it was said of the “now-Bahamas-dominant faction” that their “theory decoupled from practice ... paired with propagandistic excursions into anti-politics, will contribute nothing to clarification, but will make totalitarianism theory and racism socially acceptable in the left.”

The Berlin remnant group, which would now alone take over the magazine *Bahamas* and make it what it is today, was largely uninterested in such issues. They envisioned the development of a supposedly pure and flawless theory for a kind of antideutsch elite, which would perhaps survive beyond times in which no meaningful social practice could be developed anyway. In the years 1996 to '99, the journal temporarily opened up to individuals with an interest in theory and far less dogged left-wing views, but these were almost invariably rejected in the course of later developments. However, the “hard core” of the group was to move increasingly to the right in the course of the following years through successive ideological changes and ruptures.

A Dramatic Shift to the Right

The ideology of the “antideutsch” of 2004 is in fact not identical to that of the early generations of “antinationalists” or “antideutsch” during the 1990s. Some of the protagonists are the same, but their positions have often shifted significantly.

While the “antideutsch” were still able to present themselves as par-

⁵¹ “Group Dismantlement.”

ticularly radical anti-fascists and critics of Germany until the end of the 1990s, even if some predictions began to prove increasingly wrong from 1995 onwards, the basis for this became increasingly tenuous towards the end of the decade. There was the official state discussion about banning the NPD,⁵² accompanied by the briefly proclaimed “Aufstand der Anständigen.”⁵³ But there was also the beginning of a perception and consideration of longer-term social stability imperatives – keywords: securing pensions, recomposition of the labor pool, temporary shortages of certain qualifications such as computer specialists or nursing staff – in public discourse. This led to a repression of open, militant racism in favor of a more technocratic, utilitarian “foreigner policy,” which seeks to sort immigrants into the economically useful and the useless and operates with “Green Cards,” “Blue Cards,” German language, and adaptation courses instead of the use of firebombs. Such a rationalization of the immigration debate was repeatedly interrupted by the eruption of other moods. One can recall the “Kinder statt Inder”⁵⁴ campaign of the CDU candidate for the office of Minister-President of NRW, Jürgen Rüttgers, which responded to the “Green Card” debate in 2000. Nevertheless, the landscape regarding these issues at the beginning of this decade no longer resembles the agitated panorama characterized by unleashed hatred that presented itself to the observer during the “asylum debate” in 1991/93.

In this context, the shrill rhetoric of some antideutsch elements – the activist faction rather than the “friends of pure theory” – became increasingly implausible as a description of German conditions. This is why, on the one hand, the grouping around the *Bahamas* faction, which was detached from real social developments and partly engaged in self-referential ideological criticism and production, was able to assert itself against the remaining alarmist-activist currents. On the other hand, the capacity for projections and “shifts” of the object of (so-called) antideutsch critique grew: if the conditions in the country did not quite look like their own rhetoric, then the object of their own theories and –

⁵² Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands. “National Democratic Party of Germany,” an extreme-right (but toeing the line on being openly Nazi) political party.

⁵³ “Revolt of Decent,” a call by the German Chancellor for the decent people of Germany stand up against the rising antisemitism.

⁵⁴ “Children instead of [southern Asia] Indians.”

imaginary – struggles had to be located somewhere else.

In the “antideutsch” discourse, the real Germany no longer appeared as the seat of the conditions to be criticized, but as an accomplice of an evil raging elsewhere: National Socialism is located in Baghdad, in Ramallah, or in Cairo and has its accomplices – according to *Bahamas* – throughout Europe, in the UN, in the anti-globalization movement or, for example, in “left-wing governed, globalization-critical Chile” (statement from September 27th, 2003, section *Bin Laden rächt Allende*⁵⁵). In short: everywhere where people do not want to subscribe to their own interpretation of the “global main enemy.”

Shifting the Object of Criticism to the Middle East

The group around *Bahamas* underpins its world view with an allegedly consistent fight against antisemitism, which has long since become an all-encompassing cipher for all possible – real and imagined – world evils. Since the Gulf War polemic of 1991, the criticism of antisemitism has continued to have an impact on the now fragmented radical left. The faction around the *Bahamas* is trying to usurp it for itself through an offensive and aggressive discourse. If one follows their discourse, then they were and are in a desperate struggle with a host of left-wing antisemites, which also explains their marginalized role as a party of relentless criticism.

However, if you listen more closely, things look quite different. Their chief ideologue Justus Wertmüller, for example, literally declared on a podium at the summer party organized by the *konkret* editorial team in Hanover at the end of June / beginning of July 2000: “We are thus living, as far as the debate about antisemitism in the left is concerned ... we are living after it all. These debates are over. ... The last hard-core left-wing antisemite has been dismissed from his editorial post: Pirker.” This refers to the former editor of the daily newspaper *junge Welt*⁵⁶ Werner Pirker, who had indeed often taken questionable positions on the “heroic Palestinian people” etc. Wertmüller continues: “There are reasons for this: a long debate; criticisms that have been made, and as early as the

⁵⁵“Bin Laden Avenges Allende.”

⁵⁶“Young Wold,” a Marxist newspaper.

late 1980s ... And I maintain: there is no such thing as classic left-wing antisemitism in the form of anti-Zionism and related phenomena.”

These words must be kept in mind when listening to or reading the arguments of the *Bahamas* in debates with left-wing movements. Otherwise one would be tempted to believe that before and outside the *Bahamas* there had never been even the beginnings of serious criticism of antisemitic forms of thought, and that all (other) parts of the left were teeming with the most unreconstructed antisemites. The quote, which was made in a discussion where Wertmüller probably thought he was among his peers at the time, clearly outlines the intention of this sect's antisemitism discourse. It is about differentiation from other groups, self-presentation as a “morally superior” group, recruitment policy, and a sect-building program. Similar to how the various “Marxist-Leninist” sectarian parties pursued their development policy in the early 1970s.

In addition, however, *Bahamas* has also long been concerned with a break with the left per se. Recently, the left has made it unmistakably clear how far it has subjectively distanced itself from the original intentions of the founders of the “antinational” or “antideutsch” left. On the occasion of a “nationwide demonstration” in Hamburg, to which the editorial team together with 30 other groups called for April 24th, 2004 and to which between 100 and 150 people came, *Bahamas* founding member Clemens Nachtmann said in a speech, among other things:

Today's demonstration, at which we are briefly and succinctly expressing our support for Israel by displaying the Israel flag, is not a left-wing demonstration, but an anti-German one ... The demonstration is therefore also directed against the antideutsch left-wing radicalism that, not coincidentally, started in Hamburg in the late 1980s / early 1990s around the now completely run-down *konkret* and the so-called “Radikale Linke” ... What was wrong with this antideutsch left-wing radicalism was not that it was anti-German, but that it was radical left-wing and thus reduced the criticism of what can rightly be called German to an ordinary anti-imperialism against Germany, to self-accusatory confessionism. In the moral emphasis with which the “singularity” of Auschwitz was con-

stantly insisted upon; in the political kitsch surrounding death, which was a master from Germany.

– this derogatory passage applies to the *Todesfuge*⁵⁷ by Paul Celan, which was quoted at various demonstrations in 1990/91 –

In the circularity with which ever new and ever more boring studies on European antisemitism were thrown onto the market, there was always already a refusal to recognize that National Socialism was not merely an internal social movement related to Germany, but an international movement ... about Hitler and the Nazis, anyone who does not want to talk about the Mufti of Jerusalem and the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamnazis, should keep quiet.

What is German in the sense of the *Bahamas*,

is not a positively definable characteristic found exclusively in Germany, but rather a generalizable political-economic constellation, and therefore “antideutsch” today necessarily and naturally also includes opposition to *old europe* and militant Islam, worldwide and on one’s own doorstep.

This already contains a lot: the rejection of the intention of wanting to be left-wing at all, as well as the declared farewell to a criticism that is actually centered on conditions in Germany and therefore “anti-German.” Instead, the term is used as a cipher for a diffuse danger that can be transferred worldwide, emanating above all from the Arab region, which we learned to recognize as a spatial extension of the “Fourth Reich” in the 1991 Gulf War debate. The current *Bahamas* ally and occasional author Matthias Küntzel summed up this idea on the occasion of the Berlin congress of the *Jungle World* editorial team on the first anniversary of the attacks of September 11th, 2001 with the following words: “1945 heralded a shift of the antisemitic center from Germany to the Arab world.” Like a world spirit that wanders, independent of all social conditions

⁵⁷ “Death fugue.”

and structures. For it goes without saying that, from the point of view of both *Bahamas* and Küntzel, who has been approaching this since 2001, no distinction can be made between antisemitism in Germany before and during the Nazi era, and the “Arab antisemitism” they portray.

There is indeed anti-Jewish chauvinism in the Arab world, and conspiracy theories that have adopted elements of modern European antisemitism are also circulating there. But is this really the same as Nazi antisemitism? In reality, the idea of every German, before or after 1933, that he was supposedly oppressed by Jews was a pure ideological hallucination: he was perhaps oppressed by his authoritarian father, by the German nationalist teacher with his cane, by the roaring officer in the trenches, or by the factory master. Everything else was projection. However, the situation is different for a Palestinian or a Lebanese, who may have had very real unpleasant experiences with uniform wearers or settlers who define themselves as “Jewish.” This certainly does not justify all elements of a nationally and religiously defined conflict chauvinism – but it prohibits any equation with Nazi antisemitism. It is not without reason that the *ça ira* author Ulrich Enderwitz aptly criticized this idea of his publishers of the antideutsch ISF in November 2001: “Political-economic or national-historical, the [claimed] agreement in view of the historical gulf between Germany and the Arab world.” But what do materialistic analysis criteria matter to (“anti”-)German ideologists...

September 11th as Catalyst

Significant historical events only ever act as catalysts in such developments, but are not, or only very rarely, the actual cause of historical shifts in position. In the world view of the “late antideutschen movement,” which is to be distinguished from that of the years 1991–1995, September 11th, 2001 assumed such a catalytic function.

On this day, a radical and uncompromising opposition to the leading Western power, the USA, and its allies – at least in terms of its subjective understanding – manifested itself in a particularly dramatic way in the form of a particularly extreme (and transnational) variety of radical Islamism, which certainly did not meet emancipatory standards. Their actions certainly had nothing to do with left-wing or other criticism

of imperialism geared towards the historical progress of humanity: instead of attacking the real dominance of the Western superpowers — which actually exists at the level of economic structures — which was not recognized by the followers of this ideology nor were they thinking about its abolition, they saw the Islamists as fighting against certain visible effects of social modernization, which is sweepingly understood as “westernization” due to the preceding colonial period. In a world view underpinned by conspiracy theories, the emancipation of women and young people, the expression of criticism of religious beliefs or their diminishing binding effect in everyday social life, the disintegration of traditional family structures, and mass poverty all appear to be products of a global, comprehensive attack in a “cultural war against the countries of Islam.” The resulting project is undoubtedly opposed to the ideas of individual and collective emancipation. And in order to explain the misunderstood impact of modern, globalized capitalism on societies — supposedly torn out of a “golden phase” of Islam that has not yet been contaminated — supporters often fall back on conspiracy theories that are structurally similar to the successful anti-Jewish or antisemitic conspiracy discourses in European history and also draw on them.

For this reason, and not only because of the form of their actions on September 11th, 2001 — which is of course also to be condemned because of the ruthless “sacrifice” of 3,000 civilians — Islamist militants like the attackers can certainly not be allies of the left critical of capitalism and imperialism in a “joint struggle against US imperialism” or similar. Leftists all over the world, if they were still in their right minds, would have rejected this idea in the vast majority of cases (apart from bizarre little groups such as the Antiimperialistische Koordination⁵⁸ (AIK) in Vienna, which are more of a caricature of themselves than of any real significance). It is true that criticism of the thoughts and actions of Islamists, on the other hand, has often not been expressed or addressed explicitly enough. However, this also has to do with the fact that in most places in the world there is no tangible counterpart on the part of the Islamists to whom one could, for example, address demands — because in fact, on and after September 11th, 2001, there were by no means two roughly comparable opponents facing each other. Rather, the attacks were the

⁵⁸“Anti-Imperialist Coordination.”

result of a private war between armed factions (with presumed sponsors from the Saudi Arabian elite) against the USA. The statement that there is a fundamental irreconcilability between left-wing criticism and the form of “anti-imperialism” cultivated by the Islamists remains undoubtedly correct. However, the term “anti-imperialism” alone is likely to be misleading, as radical Islamists do not have a concept of imperialism, but believe they are fighting either against “the godless in the atheist West” or against “Christians and Jews who do not want to give Islam a place.”

In the past, for example during the war in Afghanistan (1979–89), there had been intensive cooperation between Western powers and Islamists. The fact that the latter were now acting as “unreconcilable” opponents of the leading power, the USA, gave some on the left the opportunity to stage a historical rupture. The greater the need to distance oneself from previously held positions, the more dramatically the novelty of the epoch that had opened up with *September 11th* was invoked. For example, Matthias Küntzel, who saw Adolf Hitler’s hands in the game on September 11th, 2001: “Not coincidentally,” began his article in *konkret* 11/2001, Hitler had already dreamed — according to traditions of the National Socialist minister Alfred Speer — of a firestorm to destroy New York, which was supposedly under Jewish control. A few paragraphs later, the “eliminatory hatred of Jewish New York” is unquestionably assumed to be the sole motive of the assassins. In reality, however, the attacks were aimed at a number of symbols of the USA as a superpower, such as the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, which were also hit. Not all targets were reached. The fact that the deaths of several thousand civilians at the hands of the assassins were accepted without hesitation is just as true as it is likely that in their minds the Jews — alongside atheists and other forces allied with the devil — were ascribed a special influence on US policy.

Küntzel emphasizes the, according to him, historically unique character of the assassinations as follows: “Tearing hundreds into their own suicide so that thousands burn to death at their workplaces — that is unprecedented.” Now, unfortunately, we live in a world where burning thousands of people to death in their workplaces is by no means “unprecedented” — rather, it has happened and is happening in countless wars where the fighting includes bombing. The difference is that

attempts are usually made to ensure that the pilots themselves have a better chance of survival than in the case of suicide bombers. But in the mind of Matthias Küntzel and others, September 11th should appear as a new beginning of the Holocaust. Thus writes Tjark Kunstreich in issue 37 of *Bahamas*: “It’s true: Today’s Islamists are not yet ready. On September 11th, 2001, ‘just’ under one per thousand – perhaps less – of the Jews murdered by the Nazis were killed...” The word “just” is of course intended to suggest that the work – the Islamist Holocaust – has already begun, but is not yet complete. At this time, Matthias Küntzel’s rapprochement with the *Bahamas* began, where he appeared as an author in 2002. Küntzel subsequently appeared as a supporter of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, albeit in a more reserved manner, and supported George W. Bush’s classification of Iran and Iraq as the “axis of evil” in an interview in the magazine *phase 2*. Neither the moralizing-religious and certainly not materialistic-critical idea underlying Bush’s concept of “good” and “evil,” nor the US president’s self-evident silence about who had supplied both regimes with masses of weapons technology in the 1980s, prevented him from doing so. Yet his own Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who was a special envoy to the Middle East under Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, was very directly involved in the armament of Iraq at the time (see *New York Times* of 18.08.2002). The question he posed to Detlef zum Winkel in 1991: “How many more countries do you want to bomb?” may now be addressed back to Matthias Küntzel. What has changed since then is not so much the global reality, but rather the viewpoint of politically failed and ageing leftists.

As is well known, the *Bahamas* editorial team also took September 11th as an opportunity to spectacularly trumpet its new position. In fact, it seized the opportunity to definitively break with all criticism of imperialism and to accuse the left in general, both in Germany and worldwide, of complicity with what it dubbed “Islamfascism.” In its infamous statement *Hinter dem Ruf nach Frieden verschanzen sich die Mörder*⁵⁹ published three days after the attacks, the sect’s leadership spoke out in favor of “military strikes against Islamic centers.” This would – if the wording is to have any meaning – have actually concerned religious and not political structures, for example as a desire to bomb Mecca. In fact,

⁵⁹“Behind the call for peace hide the murderers.”

in their commanding statement, the editors did not even understand radical Islamism as a political phenomenon, but sought the problem in the pre-modern, traditional religious traditions that have survived in the formerly colonized societies (but not only there!). Thus, according to their hair-raising “analyses,” the Koran is currently assigned a role similar to that of Hitler’s work *Mein Kampf* in Germany, as if a political phenomenon of the 20th century could be explained by writings dating back to the 7th century of the Christian era. It further states: “The removal of Islamic rule [as if religion ruled directly, instead of describable political structures] would wrest the populations of these countries from Muslim idolatry.” In any case, the formulation of this postulate cannot be derived from a critique of religion. For one will not find an explanation from *Bahamas* in which the Christian religion would be spoken of with comparable sharpness — which, for its part, has produced similar social and political phenomena to the Islamist movements in the course of its history, from the Catholic Inquisition to Protestant revivalist movements (from which, incidentally, the English term “fundamentalism” is derived). This is the latest departure from any approach of materialistic analysis and essentialist statements are made: “Islam” or “Christianity” are accordingly closed, self-explanatory phenomena.

According to a recent “antideutsch” reading, Germany and all the other players are primarily to blame for their lack of readiness to defend themselves against the new main global enemy. So writes the recently integrated *Bahamas* editor Sören Pünjer, a former Leipzig antideutscher:

“From Goebbels’” total war to Schröder’s total protest [against the Iraq war of 2003] is a short German path. ... Whoever fights against Islam can lose, whoever does not, has nothing to lose. This, and nothing else, is how you have to interpret the fact that the Germans are good with Islam. ... Germany today is an anti-racist peace monster with an unbroken will to become a morally superior anti-imperialist Volksgemeinschaft since 1945.

The guardians of reason are therefore — how could it be otherwise — the US conservatives, for example their prominent ideologue and author Rober Kagan.

One person who has seen through this background is Robert Kagan. He is one of the thought leaders of the much demonized American so-called neoconservatism ... And Kagan only sees salvation for the transatlantic alliance of the “West” if Europe arms itself and does something serious for its security.

The *Bahamas* editor ended with this statement:

Just as Hegel did with Napoleon, a communist’s heart ... can only beat faster at such a time, one by which the neoconservatives in the USA are currently driven by: the attempt to overturn conditions in an entire region that is in dire need of it.

Which of course means the Near and Middle East.

Elsewhere, Sören Pünjer has the following criticism to make:

The German path to peace counteracts all the left-wing talk of an alleged militarization of German foreign policy and exposes it to ridicule when compared with reality. ... At the same time, the end of the European post-war order went hand in hand with the fact that Germany, like Europe, can no longer make significant use of the USA as a protective power. Much of what the left berates as militarization has its main reason in the fact that Europe and Germany have to organise their own defence through the successive withdrawal of the United States, because since the end of the Cold War there is no longer any need for the Americans to guarantee the same military protection in place of the Europeans, including the Germans. However, in order to recognize that German policy has no intention of becoming a major military power, one must not only consider the desolate state of the Bundeswehr and the size of the defence budget [poor Bundeswehr!] but also take a look at the unbroken tradition in which the red-green policy sees itself. This self-image is strongly characterized by the continuation of Brandt’s Ostpolitik,⁶⁰ which its

⁶⁰“Eastern Politics,” a move toward the normalization of relations with Eastern Europe.

social democratic mastermind Egon Bahr became known for in the 1960s under the slogan of change through rapprochement.

And which, one might add, served well in the economic penetration of the Soviet Union's Eastern European doorstep. However, this is not Sören Pünjer's critique, but rather his main complaint:

This social democratic credo is exactly the same today with regard to the Middle East as it was in the days of Honecker and Brezhnev. ... However, [German policy] is diametrically opposed to the civilizing form of American foreign policy, except that it is neither militaristic nor pan-German, but on the contrary ... a sign of the anti-imperialist alliance with the "Third World" and here in particular the Islamic world against America.

Around 1975, the craziest of the "Marxist-Leninist" sects at the time — namely the "KPD-Aufbauorganisation"⁶¹ (KPD-AO) — distinguished themselves by suddenly advocating the "strengthening of the Bundeswehr," which had just the day before been fought against, and moving away from the previous slogan of "internal decomposition" by their comrades doing military service. This had to do with the fact that they had developed their former left-wing criticism of the rule of the bureaucracy in the USSR, following the theses of the Maoist regime in Beijing, into the thesis of the "main enemy social-imperialist and social-fascist Soviet Union." (Incidentally, they also adopted the Maoist interpretation that the bureaucratic dictatorship allegedly only began after the death of Stalin, while Stalin himself was still committed to true socialist goals). In addition, their slogans simply blindly followed the orientation of the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China, which, after the Soviet-Chinese border incidents on the Amur in 1973, increasingly focused on rapprochement with the Western powers and called on NATO to rearm against the "Soviet threat." With different justifications and in a different global context, today the right-wing antideutsch sect is following a

⁶¹ "Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands." Communist Party of Germany Pre-Party Formation, a Maoist group.

similar path of development with regard to its stance on the army of imperialism, rearmament and the international balance of power. Because there is at least one structural similarity: in times of social isolation, ideological sects that have emerged from the left stumble blindly through world history – and sometimes end up quite far to the right.

Main Enemy: The Left, and in No Case Racism

According to its own claim, the *Bahamas* has long since catapulted itself beyond left and right. So it writes in one of the calls for the Hamburg demonstration on April 24th, 2004:

Dear friends of Israel, you may have a left-wing or conservative past, you may see yourself today as a liberal, a neo-conservative, or even a communist, but that has nothing to do with your decision to take part in this demonstration. You can argue about Agenda 2010 until the sparks fly...

In fact, however, there were of course no conservatives in ties and collars, but mainly young supporters of the antideutsch in a more or less “autonomous” look. The anti-totalitarian and anti-Islamic alliance with conservative liberals has so far only been imagined by the sect, while in reality it is merely fighting for its ideological sovereignty over a fringe area of the – former – left, which is to be broken out of any historical ties to left-wing ideas. It is de facto about dominance over a small but pure “scene.”

But one thing is clear: the main danger, according to the omissions in *Bahamas*, does not come from the right (however you define it or calculate it), but from the left. In *Bahamas* No. 42, Justus Wertmüller remarks on the French right-wing extremist Jean-Marie Le Pen that he is “an old racist” and furthermore “formulates a criticism at a disgusting level against a society that has gone mad” (which means the madness lies with society, and the criticism of it with Le Pen, which means it is justified and only its level is unpleasant). But also that he raises “reasonable objections to the unchecked Islamization of the *banlieus*,” the metropolitan suburbs. An ordinary racist, at whatever level, would not have formulated this differently. Wertmüller also believes he has to specify that:

it was far more an unsavory production of the left and liberal mainstream than a real threat, whose supporters thought ... Adolf Hitler was on their doorstep when Le Pen came second in the presidential election in April 2002.

Unpleasant, but the left is worse.

This is better understood by those who know what the threat situation is like according to the new *Bahamas* ideologist Sören Pünjer:

Racism that can really still be called racism, so not the craziness of the anti-racist scene, which castigates every state regulation of immigration as racism, or those who want to summarily beat up anyone who uses the word N***er and thus do not really have a future. The future belongs to the ideology of anti-racism as an inhuman global mass consciousness, i.e. as a fusion of multiculturalism and ethnopluralism, held together by politically correct anti-Semitism.

(Interview with a Duisburg magazine, end of 2003). Well, what a shame – you can't even call someone a "N***er" anymore. The Austrian politician of the far-right FPÖ,⁶² Ewald Stadler, had already publicly complained about this in 2000.

The *Bahamas*' explicit praise for the racist diatribe by the Italian-American writer Oriana Fallaci, *The Rage and the Pride*, which states that Muslim people "are multiplying like rats" and that Europe is in the process of being colonized by them, is just another piece of the mosaic. In the fall of 2002, *Bahamas* devoted six pages of closed justification to this book, along with a few small rhetorical quibbles on points of detail. Its author Uli Krug praised Fallaci to the skies, as she called for "militarily confronting the holy warriors with anti-fascist determination." There were exactly two media outlets in Germany that treated Oriana Fallaci's book, which was primitive and inflammatory on every page, as a positive reference: The *Bahamas* and the far-right weekly *Junge Freiheit*, which included Fallaci's scandalous work in its book distribution in late fall

⁶² Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs. "Freedom Part of Austria."

2002. No, racism and right-wing agitation is really not a problem from the point of view of these “antideutsch.”

The *Bahamas* vision of “antiracism” stems from an originally left-wing critique that pointed to the weaknesses and contradictions of a classical anti-racist argumentation, according to which opposition to racism presents itself as “defense of (cultural) difference.” Such an argument can be broken up by a right-wing, biologicistic discourse, which takes up and instrumentalizes the confession of the existence of a “difference” contained therein – according to the motto: The main thing is to agree that they are not like us. In France, the masterminds of the *Nouvelle Droite* (New Right) have masterfully demonstrated this argumentative turnaround. This led to the thought-provoking situation that in the early 1980s, the – reformist association “SOS Racisme,” which at the time was more of a culturalist argument, initially advocated *le droit à la différence* (the right to difference, to being different), but then a few years later the far-right Front National suddenly adopted slogans in favor of *the droit à la différence*. For him, this ultimately meant: We majority French are not like them (namely the immigrants), and we demand our right not to be mixed with them.

These weaknesses are real – and this is what the left critique originally meant when it pointed out that the invocation of “cultural difference” by some anti-racists can also be used to defend the vision of a world as an “ethno-zoo” in which many “natural” and non-mixable “identities” exist side by side. The discourse of the *Bahamas*, which also often and gladly uses the term “ethno-zoo,” ties in with this. However, it no longer formulates a critique of the racist reinterpretation and the overturning of an originally positive intention – the defense of immigrant minorities against the racism of the majority society – but rather an exclusive critique of “antiracism” itself as such (according to Justus Wertmüller “an inhuman ideology”), whereby the latter is not even conceded to consist of different currents. That which only results from the right-wing reinterpretation of a certain anti-racist discourse is presented as the birth defect of “anti-racism” par excellence and blamed on the left across the board.

The situation is similar with the right-wing “antideutsch” denunciation

of “anti-imperialism.” Here, too, a (inner)-left criticism is originally used, but this is used for the purposes of a blanket indictment of the left of all shades. Originally, the point of this critique was that the necessary opposition to the policies of the major powers and the developed core countries of capitalism should not obscure the fact that there are also different social forces, both progressive and reactionary, in those countries of the “Third World.” The problem for the left lies in the fact that under certain circumstances reactionary forces are brought to power in certain countries by sections of the population because they can be perceived as the spearhead of the oppressed’s defensive struggle against a Western power that oppresses them. This can be explained, among other things, by the fact that certain values and principles such as “human rights” or *égalité, liberté, fraternité* and even Marxist vocabulary were used by the respective colonial powers as part of the legitimizing ideology of their rule and are discredited there. Political Islamism in particular probably provides the best example of how a force can be reactionary, authoritarian and repressive at its core — and yet be perceived by sometimes larger, sometimes smaller sections of the populations of certain countries as a driving force in the resistance against a very real imperialist dominance.

The talk of “defence of civilization,” which has long been used by right-wing antideutsch as a cheap legitimation tool for advocating “western” wars, probably still contains a core of this idea. Namely to the extent that the fear is formulated that an upheaval intended to end imperialist domination could also sacrifice some historically achieved standards, for example the minima of the rule of law, because these could be identified with the achievements of “western” societies and thus as something to be discarded.

But the reckoning on the part of the *Bahamas* ideologues has long been directed at the left-wing principle of internationalism and opposition to imperialist domination as such. Sören Pünjer claims this in the interview quoted above:

The Nazis see themselves as internationalists who have long been passionate about international solidarity and have long since become indistinguishable from leftists.

Naturally, he does not distinguish between right-wing extremist demagoguery or mimicry and reality. At the same time, he denounces the widespread left-wing idea that, for example:

that Israel is fascist with regard to the Palestinians, that the Americans are fascists with regard to the Black Power movement and Vietnam and imperialism in general is a single Eurocentric orgy of destruction with regard to anti-colonial 3rd world movements.

What an absurd thought the latter is...

In the *Bahamas* of winter 2003/04, Uli Krug does not write about colonial massacres in Algeria, Madagascar or Indochina — but he does talk about “the piles of corpses for which the post-colonial regimes *almost everywhere* are responsible” (my emphasis). As if Thomas Sankara (in Burkina-Faso) could be equated with Saddam Hussein, the Nicaraguan Sandinista regime with Pol Pot and Algeria’s situation under Ahmed Ben Bella with Khomeini’s torture chambers. And he hints at where he believes the main danger comes from:

How can one ignore the fact that the reprocessing of Nazi ideology in the late FRG is above all [above all!]

via the

“New Left,” and accordingly the focus of this ideology, now called “new internationalism,” shifted a little? For if the Versailles Germans saw themselves as the main victims of colonial oppression ... the post-68ers now imposed the identical idea entirely on the Third World, while Germany had ... switched to the camp of the enemy, to the that of the “West” — so it was possible via German ideology to be against post-war Germany.

Oops, there it is again: the world spirit that wanders around and implants German conditions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. That’s where the main danger comes from.

“Antideutsch” Anti-totalitarianism: the Masses are Bad, the Elite are Reasonable

A final trait of the right-wing drifting “antideutsch” propagandists is their de facto anti-totalitarianism. The aim here is not to discuss the possible meaningful meanings of the term “totalitarianism”: Italian fascism partly referred to itself with this term, so it can certainly have a meaningful content in relation to such a phenomenon. Hannah Arendt’s writings on this term would also require a more detailed discussion.

One thing is certain: In Germany, anti-totalitarianism in state practice and in the prevailing discourse primarily meant anti-Marxism and anti-communism. After the Nazi catastrophe and in the middle of the Cold War, it served as a convenient means of guaranteeing the political and, above all, economic stability desired by broad circles and projecting the horror of the Nazis onto the opposing Soviet bloc. German school textbooks in politics or social studies are characterized by this anti-totalitarianism of the most platitudinous variety. Social and political mass movements, one learns there, are fundamentally dangerous – it is not for nothing that the “fathers of the Basic Law” were afraid of them and therefore did not introduce any elements of direct democracy alongside those of representative democracy. This set of ideas was supplemented by another political theory idea, namely the distinction between “totalitarian” and “only authoritarian” less dangerous regimes. In this logic, the support of the FRG elites for the overthrow of the elected socialist president Salvador Allende initiated by the USA and for the seizure of power by General Augusto Pinochet was therefore entirely correct. Because since the Communist Party had helped to govern under Allende and consequently the “threat of totalitarian communism” was looming, the “merely authoritarian” Pinochet dictatorship was clearly the lesser evil.

And similar to the talk of the Weimar Republic being torn between the left and the right and the statements in the report from the Office of the Protection of the Constitution, phrases such as “left and right radicals” or “left and right extremists” also appear in the same breath in the *Bahamas*.

In a radical reversal of the false vulgar Marxist analysis of National Socialism, according to which it was merely the class dictatorship of the German bourgeoisie, the right-wing antideutsch discourse sees the problem in the dangerous masses “in itself.” These must therefore be kept under control, even if their emotions are not directly related to antisemitism. The editors of *Bahamas* write in a text from October 29th, 2003:

The communist would have to, as a revolutionary tool, counteract the organization of insurrectionary potentials that have precisely that aggression, which stems from the fear of freedom and the false longing for collectivity. At best, their discharge would be so-called revolutionary hatred directed against domination. That would perhaps not be a pogrom, the Jews would perhaps be off the hook for the time being. But the rule against which aggression is unleashed would necessarily present itself to the revolutionaries in the form of rulers and thus as individuals with names and addresses and a body that can be tortured and killed. The aforementioned aggressions would be identical to those of the antisemite, their discharge would be as spontaneous as it would be senseless and would also hit the actual target, the Jews, within a very short time. The alternative: revolt against domination or pogrom does not exist in Germany and the Islamic countries and possibly even the oh-so-progressive Latin American countries.

In terms of totalitarianism theory, a good place to take refuge is in a country whose policies are always assumed to serve freedom: the USA.

Connectivity

In addition to the bizarre, sectarian version à la *Bahamas*, there is also a real-political and successful edition of a similar ideological nature, represented by the Frankfurt author duo Thomas von der Osten-Sacken and Thomas Uwer. These protagonists, who appear rather serious in comparison to the cranky, preachy *Bahamas* tracts, write for Axel Springer’s *Die Welt* as well as the social-liberal weekly *Die Zeit* and the left-

wing (partly “antideutsch” influenced) *Jungle World*. One of the main reasons for their successful presence in the extremely statist media, despite “antideutscher” rhetoric, is their support for the attack on Iraq and for the assertion of the Atlanticist faction in the state apparatus at the expense of the factions focusing on the Europeanization of military policy. Since the latter’s line on the Iraq war initially prevailed in 2002/03, they were able to sell themselves as radical critics of an “independent German power policy,” which was characterized by the fact that it was increasingly distancing itself from the USA.

However, their starting point is by no means as critical of power as their rhetoric suggests – because one of their sharpest criticisms of German foreign policy in the 2003 Iraq War is that this policy is one of failure:

The policy of the German government appears far less radical, but similar in its logic to that of the [September 11th] assassins. Both are characterized by a “selflessness” that is willing to pay the price of its own damage for a greater good. The stubbornness expressed in the slogan “Do nothing that could subsequently legitimize the war,” with which the Germans stuck to their original decision even when the war against Iraq had long been a fact, is not part of a negotiating strategy that seeks to drive up the costs, but an expression of the unconditional will to remain consistent even against one’s own interests.

This was stated in their foreword to the pro-war-on-terror anthology *America*, which they co-authored with Andrea Woeldike. And if, in a few years, the right-wing pro-Atlanticist, or at least supporter of the latest US wars, Roland Koch were to become German Chancellor, then the current pseudo-criticism of Germany by the two Frankfurt NGO strategists would vanish into thin air.

Von der Osten-Sacken and Uwer, the two heads of a journalistic pro-war movement before and during the Iraq invasion, share some of the basic ideological orientations of *Bahamas*. Not the sometimes brutal racism, as they like to appear as advocates of the Iraqi and other populations in the Middle East who are to be liberated. But the anti-anti-imperialism,

whereby the criticism of imperialism (of varying nuances) is systematically associated with antisemitism. The reference to a reception of “critical theory” that has degenerated into an ideology of legitimacy and a de facto anti-totalitarianism are also common to the protagonists of both sides.

And so the representatives of this Frankfurt line also write for the sectarian newspaper, where they are introduced to the readership in the winter of 2003/04 as wannabe coquettes “Leutnant Thomas Uwer and Sergeant Thomas von der Osten-Sacken.” In their article about US soldiers in occupied Iraq, they write, among other things

Whether as glorifiers of war or pacifists, the relationship to war in Germany ... was characterized by an existentialism that did not take the goal of war as important, but rather war as apocalypse ... How different is the view from America, on the other hand, where wars have always served a clearly formulated goal since the Revolution, which in ideological terms is best described with the word “freedom”: whether against the British Crown, Spanish colonialism, Emperor Wilhelm, the Nazis, or communism.

Apart from the fact that Spanish colonialism was fought from 1892 to 1898 primarily in order to replace it as the colonial power in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines, the authors have learned their lesson about totalitarianism: whether against the Nazis or against communism – the fight is for freedom...

After the numerous published and unpublished images of torture in May 2004 gave an inkling of the reality of an occupying regime – which of course was by no means installed with the noble aim of “liberating” the Iraqi population, as Thomas & Thomas constantly suggest – things became temporarily quieter around the ideologues of the “civilizing mission.” However, this only lasted a few weeks. At a Cologne rally in support of the Israeli wall in the West Bank on June 5th, 2004, Justus Wertmüller, for example, whose group had not previously voiced any criticism of the reality of torture practiced by the US military and ordered by senior political decision-makers, now made a reassuring announcement:

The government, the military leadership, public opinion in the USA [including those who ordered it] have said everything that needs to be said about torture. ... Nothing will be undone, but everything will be different.

So knows the ideologue in rock-solid confidence in the “functioning democracy” in a state that at the turn of the millennium was one of seven countries in which offenders of the age of minority could be sentenced to death and executed. The other six were: five “islamfascist” countries, to use the diction of *Bahamas*, and the People’s Republic of China.

Today’s antideutsch represent for criticism of the nation and capital, as well as of the real “Germany,” what Josef Stalin represented for communism or Dieter Bohlen for music. In the history of the struggle for emancipation, they will only be a footnote. But those who cling to the idea of materialist social criticism and change should close behind them the door through which these people have taken their tortuous path to the right.

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