

How the German left failed to understand the 7 October attack

Bad Immigrant

2024-10-07

One year after the Hamas attack on Israel, I think it is important to take a look at how the Islamist group's escalation of the conflict that has been going on for generations has once again shown how the German left fails to understand international politics. As a result, we see how the left and many anarchists in the country can't find a reasonable approach to the war in Israel/Palestine and now in Lebanon. This text will hardly come as a surprise to activists in Germany. At the same time, I think it's important for anarchists and leftists in other regions to understand the German "Antideutsch" and not just see it as a joke version of some kind of political correctness, but rather as a political movement with its own ideals.

No time for history?

There is no point in delving too deeply into the history of the antigermans – a movement born out of authoritarian K-Groups (Communist Groups) critical of German reunification, the antigermans developed their ideology as a mixture of anti-nationalism and pro-Western stance. Antigermans not only stand for solidarity with Israel – more radical and reactionary parts of the movement support US imperial projects around the world in various forms. The pro-Zionist part of antigerman ideology can be seen as part of the struggle against antisemitism, but also as an attempt by certain parts of the communist movement to distance themselves from national liberation movements, including the Palestinian struggle for independence from Israel.

Over the years, with the decline of national liberation movements around the world, the main project of antigermans became support for Israel and their own version of the struggle against antisemitism. Support for the Israeli state very quickly turned into support for all the policies of the Israeli government, no matter how horrible they were. I've met quite a few antigermans who would describe themselves as pro-Zionists, and even some who call themselves "Zionists" without any connection to the Jewish community. Even though some of the criticism of Zionism is outright anti-Semitic, antigermans will put aside any criticism even if it comes from within the Jewish community itself. To label such criticism as anti-Semitic is an easy way out of any discussion or the need to critically examine one's own political views.

Quite often within the antigerman scene you can find racism against Arabs who are eagerly put into the "muslim" box. Relations with the Jewish left and anarchists are complicated. While most of them prefer to ignore anti-Zionist Jews, some parts of the antigerman movement do from time to time attack "wrong" Jews in an attempt to fight antisemitism.

Although the antigerman movement originally appeared among authoritarian communists, its ideology has spread to almost all left-wing and anarchist groups.

In a few decades it has managed to become a dominant position on Middle Eastern politics. And even though there are fewer groups today that would describe themselves as purely antigerman, most anarchist and left-wing groups integrate an antigerman agenda into their politics. From the FAU to local anarchist organisations, a pro-Zionist approach can be found as the norm.

From the past into the future?

There was no deep analysis nor attempts to understand the whole complexity of reasons behind attack on 7 October by the German left. Support went straight to the state. Those killed by Hamas and its allies automatically became “victims”, regardless of their political views on the situation. It was easy for the German left to ignore the calls for de-escalation from the families of the murdered. While the Israeli left and liberals were pretty sure that Netanyahu would escalate the violence in his own interests. While the families of the hostages were protesting against a right-wing government that was trying to use their families as a pretext for war, the German left was eagerly looking for an escalation against “Hamas”. The collective responsibility for Hamas’ actions was easily placed on the shoulders of all those living in Gaza Strip. “They voted for Hamas”, “If they want freedom, they should rise up against Hamas”, “They are anti-Semites who want to drown all the Jews” – these are just some of the ways in which people have been talking about the Israeli operation in Gaza. And I’m not talking about right-wing political movements, I’m talking about a lot of people who consider themselves left-wing or anarchist.

The war crimes committed by the IDF, which were broadcast live on Tiktok, were mostly ignored or made people feel ‘concerned’, but the general tendency to support the Israeli state continued. The attitude towards Palestinians within the German left remained hostile, while the gap between the reality of what is happening in the Middle East and the made-up world of politics in Germany grew wider. At this point, it is quite common for the German left to justify every questionable action of the Netanyahu government on the grounds of self-defence by the Israeli right. War crimes are considered fine as long as Israel is fighting the bad guy – the collective Arabs who are all responsible in one way or another for the anti-Semitic past and present of Europe and the Middle East.

Interestingly, many political positions within the left-wing movement on Israel are in line with the ideology of the German state on this issue. With political parties changing in power, but hardly any of them critical enough to influence the situation in the Middle East in any way. In many ways, the demands and values of the antigerman movement are translated into state policies that ban certain events, withdraw funding from those supporting the boycott campaign, or deny entry to “undesirable” activists. This also applies to educational work – it is quite common

for German left-wing projects on Israel to be funded by the German state. Obviously, these educational events are often an extension of political support for Israeli state policy extending its influence to left-wing and anarchist circles.

With all this in mind, it is only logical that the German left these days prefers to ignore and sometimes proactively isolate leftists, anarchists and even liberals from Israel or Palestine who have something to say on the matter. Events of such activists are sabotaged or struggle to find space to speak¹ (despite the massive infrastructure of the left). Repressions of activists organized by the German state in solidarity with the Palestinians or in protest against the policies of the Netanyahu regime are generally ignored, and foreign activists are left to their own, as the local left movement prefers to ignore the massive pressure building up on the Jewish and Palestinian diaspora. It is more common to see local antifascists protesting with Israeli flags at Palestinian or anti-Zionist Jewish demonstrations than to see them in any way showing solidarity with oppressed people in different parts of the Middle East.

The situation might have been different if the German left had had allies in Israel or Palestine to support in the struggle against Netanyahu and his war machine. But years of antigerman politics, mixed with ignorance of the situation in the Middle East, have put the German left in political isolation: they aren't really needed by the Zionist right, but they don't want to get close to any progressives from Israel or Palestine. The generational development of antigerman ideology makes cooperation with Israeli Jews or Palestinians even more difficult: the leftist and anarchist movement today mostly accepts young people who follow antigerman narratives and pushes those who might question them into the hands of authoritarian communists whose ideological approach to the situation in the Middle East hasn't changed since the death of Mao. As a result, there is very little chance that the situation will actually develop in a reasonable direction in the coming years.

After a year of violence and death, we're seeing pretty much the same mistakes that we've seen in relation to the war in Ukraine – ideology wins out over reality, while very few actually make an effort to understand the situation and develop a serious approach to it. The shock of the war and its mobilization passes very quickly and most people within the left and anarchist circles fall back to ideological dogmas that were there when they joined political movements. In such an atmosphere, both the left and the anarchist movement are doomed to repeat mistakes and fall into the same trap again and again, unless we decide to make an effort to understand the crisis and develop answers to it according to our political values. Otherwise, in the coming storms of the future, we risk handing the world over to reactionary forces that don't hesitate to use violence and destruction to gain political power.

Through this crisis we can also see the growing gap between the German left

¹A lecture by the Jewish anarchist Uri Gordon, organized in Leipzig a few years ago, took place in a private room because no left-wing project agreed to allow him to give his lecture.

and its possible comrades in the crisis zones. As wars and protests demand more solidarity and effort, we witness many abandoning critical politics in favor of the comfort offered by more and more reactionary governments of the so-called “first world”.

But I want to end by actually focusing on those who are trying to break with the antigerman past. There are groups all over the country who work on education, solidarity and cooperation with different Jewish and Palestinian groups. They invest their time in traveling to the occupied territories to get to know the local population and their struggle against state violence. These people, although very small in left and anarchist circles, still give hope that radical and revolutionary politics are alive even in Germany.

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