

Communism, anti-German criticism and Israel

An interview with Stephan Grigat by Jens Misera

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Jens Misera: You are a member of the Viennese group "Café Critique", a pool of anti-German communists. What is your definition of communism?

Stephan Grigat: Communism is a concept which cannot be defined in terms of the established social sciences. Strictly speaking, communism is nothing more than the movement of materialistic criticism. And communists, who detest propaganda, should refuse to deliver too detailed descriptions of a possible communist society. Not because one could not imagine a society beyond the utilization imperative of capital and the domination imperative of the state, but rather because of the simple reason that people should talk about and criticise the existing reality in the first place. People who are only interested in how the bananas will come to Europe and who will remove the dirt from the streets in communism – questions which appear to be rather strange, by the way, in view of the fact that approximately two thirds of humanity live in misery – those people don't find fault with the existing system anyway. But criticizing the existing also basically implies, how it should be instead: Communism is not about a dictatorship of people over people, but rather about a dictatorship of the will and the wishes of people over the objective-material conditions of their existence. Therefore, materialistic criticism is about creating social conditions, which enable people for the first time, to plan their lives self-confidently, that is, beyond the utilization imperative and domination imperative of state and capital. This is not paradise on earth, where there are no problems and contradictions any more, but a society established according to the requirements of reason, where no one, anywhere in the world, must starve because he does not have enough means. Communism, in this sense, has nothing to do with either traditional marxism nor with alternative renunciation ideologies. It is neither about an equal distribution of misery, nor about consumption renunciation. "Luxury for everybody" is much closer to Marx's intentions. Communist criticism does not want to create pre-bourgeois circumstances, neither concerning productivity (with all necessary criticism of a technology developed under the capital relation), nor concerning the emancipation of the individual from the chains of archaic communities, which had begun just then. Communist criticism does not accuse capitalism of creating luxury goods, but rather that such things are withheld from most people, although that would be not necessary. Withheld not through the evil will of some individuals or the conscious acting of a class (although this may play a role), but rather through the logic of a system, that is not oriented towards people's needs, but towards the realization of capital. Communist criticism does not accuse bourgeois societies of creating certain freedom rights and individual rights, but rather points out that a society that

requires such rights remains a violent society. We do not argue against the fact that the bourgeois citizen is promised the pursuit of happiness (Glücksversprechen), but rather try to point out its ideological essence and to clarify that this promise actually cannot be kept in a bourgeois society.

And why is this communism anti-German?

There is something worse than capitalism and bourgeois society: its barbarous abolition. And that is what Germany stands for, that is what national socialism and fascism stand for, that is also what panarabic-nationalist ideas and islamist ideas stand for today. These ideologies stand for an anti-capitalism full of resentments, which does not want to abolish the misery caused by the capital, but rather wants to reorganize it in a national-collective (*volksgemeinschaftlich*) or umma-socialist way, and adds to the cynical instrumental reason of bourgeois society which takes into account the death of countless people shruggingly, the delusional extermination of people for the sake of their extermination.

In the context of anti-German criticism, „German“ should always be understood in the sense of criticism of ideology. It is not a matter of an hereditary national character, but a political-economic constellation which favors extermination, where others in the West pursue certain goals with the help of certain means. So, this is not about a special mentality, but a specific form of capitalist socialisation, which then indeed does create "typical German" social characters. In Germany, a special form of relationship between state, bourgeoisie and society has eventually led to the shoah. And this relationship still exists. As Clemens Nachtmann has once pointed out so accurately, this constellation can be described as "German", because it was first established in Germany where it was able to display its bestial potential. But this constellation is not a phenomenon that can be limited to a specific historical period or a specific territory, thus neither to the German state nor the time of National Socialism. It results from a socialisation that is committed to the realization imperatives of the capital and the ruling imperatives of the state. Therefore, "German" can also be generalized.

Which developments led to the present anti-German criticism?

The history of today's anti-Germans began at the end of the eighties. In some segments of the radical left in the Federal Republic of Germany there were disputes about anti-Semitic implications in the solidarity-campaigns with Palestine, which went totally unreflected upon in the left at that time. These disputes were also encouraged by the polemics of authors like Wolfgang Pohrt or Eike Geisel. Then the Berlin Wall fell and German reunification was on the agenda. The anti-Germans – at that time consisting of a much more heterogeneous group of left wing people – deprecated the reunification, not out of a particular sympathy for the post-stalinistic GDR (German Democratic Republic), but rather because of the insight that with the reunification the last visible consequences of the German responsibility for exterminatory war and shoah will disappear, making it possible for Germany to take a new chance and make a new attempt in its

delusional efforts. There were two large demonstrations under the slogan "Germany – never again" and "Death is a master from Germany" in Frankfurt and in Berlin. While most of the Germans, including large parts of the left, tumbled into a nationalistic delirium we, on the other hand, rather agreed with Dov Shilansky, the then-speaker of the Israeli Knesset, who declared the day of the German reunification a day of mourning.

We feared the formation of a "Fourth Reich". These apprehensions seemed absolutely justified and reasonable, taking into account the rhetoric of German politicians at the time, the racist pogroms which began immediately after the reunification, the blunt relativization of Nazi-crimes, the policy towards Yugoslavia, the attempts at getting a seat in the World Security Council, the efforts for military rearmament and the legitimation of German foreign deployments as well as economic expansion towards the East. Soon it became apparent however, that the resurrection of Germany cannot be criticized sufficiently with the help of the concept of the "Fourth Reich" and we tried to dedicate ourselves more strongly to the criticism of that, what we call "German ideology" and "German solution model for crises".

The discussions within the German left during the gulf war in 1991 were important for many people – also for me, as I still lived in Berlin at that time. While people in Israel had to hide in shelters wearing gas masks and feared coming under fire by Iraqi Scud-rockets equipped with German poison gas every hour, the German left celebrated its anti-war rallies, and explained to the Israelis, that it was their own fault, and was happy to receive encouraging compliments from Saddam Hussein in their battle against the USA and its "Zionist protégé". Hardly any one of us spoke up in support of the war lead by the USA at that time, a war which also took place under totally different circumstances than the military intervention in 2003. But the experiences with the German left during the German reunification and the Gulf War led to a breach, that could no longer be bridged.

In the course of the nineties several magazines were founded. These projects tried to deal with the historical mistakes of traditional Marxism and thus to criticize Marxist-Leninist theories of imperialism, fascism and capitalism under the premise of a new Marxist discourse. Criticising antisemitic antizionism within the left eventually resulted in an explicit partisanship for Israel. A little later, similar developments also took place in Austria. Today there are also groups in Switzerland which can be described as anti-German in a wider sense.

On the other hand, these projects were also about trying to intervene directly, driven by the desperate and arbitrary hope to be able to save something of the emancipatory potential of the left. How poor the results of these interventions were, can be seen regarding the final bankruptcy of the left after the anti-Semitic massacre on 9/11. In the light of the condition of the left all around the world and in light of the still intolerable condition of this world, our criticism was perfectly useless and without influence. But many of today's discussions, not only within the left, would be totally different today or would not be led at all, if it wasn't for some materialists, who, for the last fifteen years, got on the nerves of everyone by meddling with their criticism of Germany and capitalism.

German conditions have already been criticised by Karl Marx, Theodor W. Adorno and Jean Améry. What is the reference point to these precursors?

Well, every anti-German communist would probably mention Marx and Adorno when asked about their theoretical references. Marx is the critic of political economy, and thus the critic of the political-economical context on the basis of which all evil in this world and the German evil in particular thrives. Marx already called for a “war against German conditions” in his early writings and postulated that these German conditions were even below the level of criticism. Marxists later didn’t take up this thought, let alone understand it. Adorno was the first one who pointed out the consequences of the shoah and the reality of the German *Volksgemeinschaft* as a central theme for the materialistic criticism of society.

Unlike the Bolshevik occurrences of marxism, anti-German communists are not into worshipping classic authors. They rather wish to sharpen the weapons of criticism by applying a critical theory of society, in order to contribute assiduously to overthrow all forms of authority, including the authority of Bolshevik dogmas. Therefore we also look into Freudian psychoanalysis.

Jean Améry was one of the first people, who criticized a new, left-wing anti-Semitism appearing in the shape of anti-Zionism. At the same time, he was also one of the sharpest critics of atrocities committed by the Israeli security forces, by the way. That we do refer to Améry today, already becomes clear bearing in mind that Gerhard Scheit, one of my colleagues at Café Critique, is significantly involved in publishing a complete works issue of Améry at Klett-Cotta publishing house.

In 2003 you published a book (as an editor) called "Transformation of post-Nazism. The German-Austrian way to democratic fascism" (Cairn publishing house, Freiburg). What do "post-Nazism" and "democratic fascism" mean?

Among other things, the realization that the denouncement of the reunited Germany as the “fourth Reich” implies numerous doubtful associations from the repertoire of tradition marxism, especially with respect to “German imperialism”, lead us to deal with concepts like “post-fascism” and “post-Nazism”.

In the context of the discussions about the German reunification, we were especially interested in the question of whether there will be a fascization of democracy in the course of its renationalization, or whether this so called fascization had long before been realized in post-fascism, so that it would be more appropriate to speak of a democratization of fascism today.

The concepts of “post-fascism” and “post-Nazism” try to grasp the fact that the killing did indeed have an end in 1945, but that there has never been any so called “Stunde Null” (zero hour). Instead, the post-fascist and post-national socialist democracies have rather incorporated structural elements of fascism and national socialism.

If you reflect on that, you can hardly continue pursuing the anti-fascist traditions of the left, permanently observing some Nazi groups (as much importance as such work still has of course), but you rather have to

deal with society as a whole and make it clear to yourself, that a post-Nazi consciousness is common not only among the Austria "Freedom Party" of Jörg Haider or some comparatively marginalized neonazi groups. (Obviously, these neonazis with their open reference towards National Socialism aren't very conducive for the German export industry in any case.)

The concept of "democratic fascism" tries to combine elements which seem totally contradictory for bourgeois consciousness. In Austria, the term also takes into account that this is not only about the Nazi era, but also the so called Austro-fascist era in the 1930s. At the same time, you have to be aware of the problem, that the term "National Socialism" – the indispensable (explicit or implicit) main point of reference for German and Austrian politics – vanishes in favor of a more general concept of "fascism". This problem alone let us choose the term "post-Nazism" instead of the more widely known term "post-fascism" as a title for the book I published as an editor. I think it is very important to outline the difference between fascism in general and National Socialism in particular. Of course National Socialism also was a form of fascism. But the German and Austrian eliminatory anti-Semitism in particular is something which was not characteristic for fascism in general.

In what way is your partisanship for the state of Israel compatible with your struggle for communism?

It is not only compatible, but partisanship for Israel is a compelling consequence of communist criticism – even if most people who call themselves communists obviously have a totally different attitude. I am afraid I have to go into some detail to explain that.

In Marx's Critique of Political Economy, there is a very good explanation of why the hate of resentment-driven people consistently directs itself against the interest-bearing capital. Marx was already aware, that the capital in "its most remarkable form which is at the same time the form which comes closest to its most popular image" will be the preferred "point of attack of a superficial criticism", the point of attack of a resentment-ridden anti-capitalism characteristic not only for the Nazis.

Authors who are oriented towards Marx like the Chicago sociology professor Moishe Postone have shown how and why the interest capital and other aspects of bourgeois society are associated with Jews in a paranoid and delusional way. Resulting from such paranoid and delusional projections is a form of fetishistic anti-capitalism, which eventually ends up biologizing capitalism as international Jewry.

This is one point where anti-Semitism differs fundamentally from other forms of racism. Anti-Semitism claims to have an explanation of the world as a whole. Anti-Semitism is the most barbarous reaction thinkable to the fact that people are forced into capital's productivity and state loyalty. At the same time, it agrees with it to the greatest possible extent. Anti-Semitism is not simply about hating Jews, but rather about hating everything that Jews embody for the anti-Semites.

Anti-Semitism (especially in its geopolitical reproduction as anti-Zionism) is fed by dull resentments against civilization and individuality, against intellectuality, abstractness and liberality, against excess and freedom, against the bourgeoisie (in the original sense) and against communism in its only emancipatory

sense – providing the chance of individual happiness as an absolute antithesis to the delusion of a "völkische" identity.

With respect to Israel, everything could be so simple for people who are interested in emancipation, i.e. for communists: anti-Semitism, which was already anti-Zionist with the Nazis, led to the Shoah. Germans, Austrians and their "*Hilfsvölker*" (assisting people[s]) organized and carried out the annihilation. All other countries were not willing or able to prevent the mass murder for a long time. The establishment of the state of Israel – which was a necessary consequence, but happened too late unfortunately – took place in a situation, where after national socialism no attempts were made, to abolish state, nation, capital and Germany, and thus the basis for modern anti-Semitism once and for all.

Solidarity with Israel includes solidarity with its self-defense – a fact for which nobody has to become an enthused militarist, but on the other hand nobody should deny the fact that military actions and police actions always lead to abhorrent violence. Solidarity with Israel, in any case, should be a matter of course without the need to be explained in great detail. But of course one should be aware of the connection between the socialisation of capital and state with anti-Semitism. If you are aware of that, you don't have to refer to doubtful arguments like "Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East" – even if the difference between the Israeli society and the neighbour countries is quite obvious – but you can simply state: Solidarity with the state of the survivors of the Shoah is no accidental accessory of criticizing political economy in order to establish general emancipation, but its necessary consequence.

In this context, Zionism is not the right answer to anti-Semitism, but for the time being, it is the only answer possible. (The "right" answer still being the free association of free individuals, a liberated society, in which people can be individuals without fear and compulsion)

Here you see that the categorical imperative in the version of Karl Marx and in that of Theodor W. Adorno do not contradict themselves in any way: Adorno wrote: "Hitler has imposed a new categorical imperative upon humanity in the state of their unfreedom: to arrange their thinking and conduct, so that Auschwitz never repeats itself, so that nothing similar ever happen again." This can only be achieved bearing in mind Marx's "categorical imperative to overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being." From a materialistic point of view, the Zionist categorical imperative would then be, roughly: As long as there are people, who feel committed to Marx's imperative, but don't succeed in implementing it in any way, we try to follow Adorno's imperative by providing the physical integrity of Jews with force.

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