

Germany, Iran, and the Party of the Left: A Commentary Commissioned by *Neues Deutschland*, which it Refused to Publish

by Matthias Küntzel

[*Matthias Küntzel, author of [Jihad and Jew-Hatred](#), received an invitation to write on Germany and Iran for Neues Deutschland: the former "Pravda" of Communist East Germany, it is now a daily, close to the "Linkspartei," the Party of the Left, itself undergoing various organizational restructurings. It is the home of various "post-communist" currents. It is represented in the Bundestag and several state legislatures; it also exercises some influence on discussions within the much larger Social Democratic Party. Within the Left, the evaluations of Iran—as reactionary or an "anti-imperialist" ally—and of Israel are both hotly contested.—RB*]

The Invitation

On May 29, 2008, Christian Klemm, a collaborator at the daily *Neues Deutschland* asked me to provide a commentary piece. He wrote:

"The discussion of the relations between the Federal Republic [of Germany] and the Islamic Republic of Iran is both current and of interest to our readers. Even within the Left, this topic is quite controversial. There are voices that approve of a normal, diplomatic relation to this country. Others on the Left go so far as to consider this state as their anti-imperialist ally.

However, there is simultaneously considerable skepticism regarding this stance. Some political scientists see Iran as a basically antisemitic state, that cultivates a very worrisome attitude to the State of Israel. The weekly debate page in *Neues Deutschland* is an appropriate forum to discuss this controversial topic. . . . In general, the debate page presents two contrary positions in "pro and contra" style. We do not edit the submitted texts. . . . I would be very pleased, if you would be willing to write a piece on this topic for our newspaper."

The Rejection

On July 11, 2008, only 49 minutes after I submitted my commentary to *Neues Deutschland*, Christian Klemm sent me the following letter:

Dear Mr. Küntzel!

After reading your submission, the editorial board has decided not to print your text. In our opinion, it does not, first of all, treat the posed questions, and secondly, it lacks any journalistic seriousness.

Christian Klemm, *Neues Deutschland*

The Response

Hello Mr. Klemm,

Your letter surprised me. During my 35 years of writing, I have never received this sort of dis-invitation. However I have also never previously had anything to do with *Neues Deutschland*.

You apparently want to demonstrate precisely on the fiftieth anniversary of *Neues Deutschland* that in principle nothing has changed in the newspaper. Do you really believe that you will be able to silence my arguments this way?

You want to suppress a debate before it has even begun. The reasons you cite are ridiculous. Why do you not let your readers decide if my commentary is serious journalism or not, and whether it addresses the topic, or not. Can you really not recognize that I present good arguments that tougher sanctions on Iran are necessary and that I argue for an opposition [*the Left in the Bundestag—RB*] that would "relentlessly pressure the government to meet its promises for sanctions"?

Your decision [against publishing the piece] was evidently made on the basis of emotions. Between the arrival of the commentary—that you had requested—and that decision by the editorial board not to publish it, there were only at most 50 minutes. Is that what you call "journalistic seriousness"? To me it looks more like panic.

Instead of checking my sources, instead of looking for counter-arguments, instead of suggesting specific changes, you act as if time has stood still since that day, "June 29, 1958, in the Stalinallee," which you celebrate nostalgically in your special section to the fiftieth anniversary of *Neues Deutschland*. Back then, one was not permitted to criticize Nagy's execution in Hungary. And today one is not allowed to discuss the biggest problem for the Party of the Left, your relationship to Iran? What was then a tragedy is today simply bizarre. Nonetheless, many thanks, Herr Klemm! I have learned something. Thanks also for the scandal: sometimes dead articles live longer. Shalom!

Matthias Küntzel

P.S. You may keep my honorarium of 39 cents per line. I have decided to publish my piece and our correspondence elsewhere.

And this is the article itself:

The latest report on Iran by the International Atomic Agency is alarming: eighteen appendices provide detailed lists of the military components of the program and the influence on the program by the military. [1] At the same time, the powers in Tehran denounce Israel as a "dirty black germ" and a "cancer-like growth," as they predict its elimination with growing frequency.

Australia and Canada want to charge Ahmadinejad with incitement to genocide. The UN Security Council has passed three sanctions resolutions to stop the nuclear program. Even Chancellor Merkel has, to the dismay of Siemens, Linde, and RWE, called for tougher sanctions.

And what about the Party of the Left, which, at its national convention in Cottbus in May 2008, boasted of its role as the avant-garde in the fight against right-wing radicalism, antisemitism, and nuclear energy? Is it leading the fight against Iranian fascism, antisemitism, and nuclear delusions? Is it utilizing the capacity of a parliamentary opposition to relentlessly pressure the government to meet its promises for sanctions?

Not at all. The Leftists give the impression as if they had nothing more important to do than to follow the example of Chavez, Castro, and Ortega in Latin America and become the most important ally of the Mullah regime in Berlin.

As early as April 2006, the leader of the Bundestag caucus of the Party of the Left, Oskar Lafontaine, hoped to travel to Iran to confer with Ahmadinejad—a plan halted not by the Party but by the Iranian government. At that time, Ahmadinejad had just launched his first Holocaust-denial campaign in the form of the cartoon contest. It was however not the Iranian President's antisemitism that angered Lafontaine but the "pharisaical" and "untenable" policies of the West with regard to Iran. While he did concede that "the development of the Iranian nuclear program would be a threat," he asserted that "peace would not be achieved by denying a country the rights one claims for oneself." [2] Should therefore Iran of all countries have a right to nuclear weapons technology?

Of course it should!—according to Norman Peach, the foreign policy spokesman for the Party of the Left in a comment on the Party's homepage. "What one grants Israel and Pakistan cannot be denied to Iran." The West should therefore give up its demand that Iran cease its efforts at uranium enrichment. [3] This logic is stunning. Whether the leadership of a country is obsessed with martyrdom or not, whether it has declared its intentions to eliminate another country or not—Peach doesn't care. According to his analogy, if Roosevelt had had the atom bomb early in 1945, one could not have "denied" it to Hitler.

So far, the Party of the Left has opposed every effort in the Bundestag to put pressure on the Mullah regime. Even parts of the peace movement have begun to defend the center of Islamism. "No sanctions or threats of war against Iran!"—this slogan in the jargon of the "Third World Movement" was included in the call to the Hamburg Easter Peace March 2008. It might as well have been "Nuclear Weapons for the Mullahs!"

And what about the mistreatment of women in Tehran, the hanging of gays, the shootings of Bahá'ís, the torture of union members and the stonings of "sinners"? Take a look at what the authors of the "Peace and Security Policy Group" at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation [*affiliated with the Party of the Left*] have written. In a style reminiscent of Erich Honecker [*long time Head of State of Communist East Germany*], they insist that "with greatest determination and never wavering" the Iranian leadership "rejects an expansive transplantation of Western values." And therefore a partner in resistance? With regard to the "Iranian Path to Development," they continue, "a position is necessary that accepts unquestionably that Iran will pursue a self-determined path oriented on Islam and the social particularities and values of its culture." [4] Great: fatwas instead of Coca-Cola!

This paper from the Luxemburg Foundation in October 2006 minimized the importance of Iranian Holocaust denial and the announced intention to eliminate Israel in barely two sentences. The nonchalance in the face of the promise of a new genocide and the rejection of any sanction policies by the Bundestag group make clear how little the catastrophe of Auschwitz and the eliminationist antisemitism of the Nazis have ever even been noticed by this part of the Left. They also demonstrate an ideologically motivated refusal of reality, with no obvious comparison. Evidently the habitual hostility to the United States and Israel has destroyed the ability to recognize new forms of antisemitism and the threat to Israel with weapons of mass destruction, let alone a capacity to do anything. Yet George Steiner, who narrowly

escaped the Nazis in 1940, made a comment that remains relevant today: "Men share the guilt for everything that leaves them indifferent."

The time bomb is ticking. Since 1945, the world has become accustomed to the idea of nuclear weapons in the hands of secular or semi-secular powers. Iran is something new. For the first time, the destructive potential of the bomb will be united with the fury of a declared religious war, the belief in the Mahdi, and an ideology of martyrdom. This link to a global religious mission makes the Iranian nuclear program the greatest current danger on the planet. The likelihood that an Iranian nuclear bomb will lead to a world war in the twenty-first century is simply too great to do nothing.

Yet the Party of the Left did not even address the "Iranian Nuclear Program" at its recent Cottbus convention. This makes it all the more important to include a discussion of Iran in the current intra-party Israel debate. Whoever defends Ahmadinejad's Iran against America—and especially in the context of a final effort to find a peaceful solution through tougher sanctions—prepares the way for a scenario which one otherwise claims to oppose: a military confrontation. If Tehran is not put under pressure immediately and massively through sanctions, if it is not forced to choose between changing its nuclear plans and devastating economic and political damage, then we will have a choice between one bad alternative—the military option—and a worse one: the Iranian bomb.

Translated by Russell Berman. The German original can be found [here](#).

Notes

1. "[Iran and the Inspectors](#)," *New York Times*, May 28, 2008.
2. "'Wir können nicht warten, bis Bush etwas merkt': A Conversation with Oskar Lafontaine," *Neues Deutschland* February 13, 2006.
3. Tilman Steffen, "[Linke sieht Westen im Streit mit Iran unterlegen](#)."
4. Arne Seifert, Wolfgang Grabowski, Hans Jürgen Krysmanski, Claus Montag, John Neelson, Werner Ruf, Jochen Scholz, Peter Strutynski, Joachim Wahl, "[The Anti-Iranian Offensive: More than a Nuclear Controversy: From the "Peace and Security Group of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation](#)," October 2006.