

German politician belittles Holocaust

Left Party's Hermann Dierkes justifies Palestinian "armed resistance."

BERLIN – Hermann Dierkes, a regional Left Party politician in Duisburg, North Rhine-Westphalia, terms Israel's right to exist as "petty," justifies Palestinian rocket attacks against Israeli civilians, and plays down the severity of the Holocaust, in a video circulating on YouTube, prompting leading national politicians of the Left Party to condemn him in unusually strong language on Friday.

In a joint statement to *The Jerusalem Post*, Gregor Gysi, the party's head in the Bundestag – Germany's parliament – and deputy Petra Pau, said, "Left-wing criticism of Israeli politics may not relativize either Israel's right to exist or the Holocaust, or it leads itself ad absurdum. Mr. Dierkes does not speak for the Left Party."

"Dierkes is a known Israel-hater and anti-Semite," Stephan J. Kramer, the secretary-general of Germany's Jewish community, told the *Post* on Thursday.

Dierkes ran last year for mayor of Duisburg, a city with about 500,000 residents, and promotes a boycott of Israeli merchandise. He is chairman of the Left Party in the Duisburg city council.

In November, at a conference titled "Marx is a must" in Berlin, he was caught on video delivering a hate diatribe against Jews and the State of Israel.

In his roughly seven-minute tirade, he slammed Israel for "defining itself as a Jewish state" and compared it to the former South African apartheid regime.

"Palestinians have the right to armed resistance" against Israelis, said Dierkes. He played down Palestinian rocket attacks against Israeli civilians as "chemical fertilizer missiles," suggesting that the rockets cause no damage.

In his talk at the conference, Dierkes belittled the Holocaust and the so-called "special relationship" between Israel and Germany, an outgrowth of Germany's obliteration of European Jewry.

"Israel as only the refuge for the survivors of the Holocaust... The survivors are dying. That is the most dangerous place for all the Jews in the world... The entire thing is dishonest," he said.

According to Dierkes, Germany's 1941-1945 war against the Soviet Union involved a loss of 21 million Russians, and "where is the voice today that we should have a special relationship to the Soviet Union or to the successor states of the Soviet Union?"

Kramer, from the 106,000 member Central Council of Jews in Germany, told the *Post*, "Dierkes is a known Israel-hater and anti-Semite in the clothing of a 'do-gooder' supposedly concerned with human rights. The Left Party would be well advised to publicly distance itself from his crude ideas. As a local politician, too, he is spreading an intolerably poisonous brew that is calculated to promote hatred of Israel and Jews.

“The fact that the Nazis attempted to exterminate the entire Jewish people is, in the eyes of Dierkes, evidently not unique,” he added.

Kramer’s criticism appears to have triggered Gysi and Pau to issue a harsh public rebuke of Dierkes. They strive to curb the flourishing anti-Israeli sentiments within the Left Party, the former East German communist party that is now the fourth largest in the Bundestag.

Gysi and Pau are the two most prominent members of the party who vehemently reject the anti-Zionist and left-wing anti-Semitic attitudes among broad swaths of Left Party members of parliament and supporters. According to observers of the party, what makes Gysi and Pau’s public condemnation of Dierkes so remarkable is their decision to not turn inward and address Dierkes’s anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish outbursts with a closed-door party session.

When asked for a comment on Kramer’s criticism of Dierkes and his appearance on YouTube, Ute Abraham, the spokeswoman of the Left Party in Duisburg, told the *Post*, “I do not wish to participate as spokeswoman of the Duisburg Left Party district chapter in publications that continue to denigrate,” and, “Mr. Dierkes argues for Israel’s right to exist” in his book *Unconditional for Israel? Positions and Actions beyond German Sensitivities*.

The party’s Duisburg chapter is widely considered a hotbed of hardcore anti-Israeli sentiments, and played a role during protests in the region last year in fomenting hate against Israel because of its Operation Cast Lead offensive in Gaza to stop Hamas rocket attacks.

The YouTube video showing Dierkes first appeared last week on the Ruhrbarone blog, which is seeking to stop Dierkes’s “anti-Israeli agitation” at his book presentation scheduled for Tuesday in the city-funded Duisburg International Center. The center is less than a hundred meters from the Duisburg Jewish Community Center.

Kramer told the *Post*, “After everything Israel has done to them, the Palestinians – in Dierkes’s view – have the right to ‘resist.’ In addition, those firing missiles from Gaza are demanding Israel’s destruction – for Mr. Dierkes, apparently ‘legitimate resistance’ with ‘chemical fertilizer missiles.’”

“He thereby accepts the thesis that Israeli Jews should be punished with extermination just for existing. Here Dierkes is drawing on sinister, classically anti-Semitic sources.”

Modern anti-Semitic expressions – the loathing and international disparate treatment of the Jewish state – are frequently ignored by the German media. Inflammatory language against the Jewish state is routinely seen as mere criticism of Israeli policy. While Dierkes’s statements meet the European Union’s definition of contemporary anti-Semitism, many German reporters are unaware of the EU’s criteria or themselves harbor anti-Israeli sentiments, according to German media critics. The German press has not reported on the Dierkes scandal.

