Former Swiss Eurovision Song Contest winner Nemo has repeatedly called for a boycott of Israel. It is now clear that his hatred of the Jewish state is hereditary. His ancestors supported Hitler and one of them even served in the Waffen SS.

From Christoph Mörgeli

Last month, “musician” Nemo Mettler returned the winner’s trophy from the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) in protest against Israel’s participation in this year’s competition in Vienna. On Instagram, Nemo accused Israel of “genocide”. The major event had repeatedly been used to “polish the image of the state of Israel, which is accused of serious misconduct, while at the same time the organizers claimed that the competition was apolitical”.

Regarding Israel’s participation in the next ESC, he said: “I welcome the decision of those countries that have joined the boycott.” Nemos emphasizes values such as “unity”, “inclusion” and “dignity for all people” – although he does exclude Israeli singers from humanity.

“More and more in black and white”

If Nemo does it, you can say it all again. And all Israelis are collectively blamed for the Gaza war. Three days after Nemo’s announcement, two Islamist terrorists in Australia massacred fifteen Jews and seriously injured forty others. In the run-up to the ESC event in Basel, Nemo 2025 had already called for the exclusion of Israel – represented at the ESC by a survivor of the Hamas massacre – in the “Huffington Post”. When asked whether he had an opinion on this topic, Nemo replied: “Personally, I think it makes no sense for Israel to take part in this Eurovision Song Contest. And the Eurovision Song Contest in general.”

After his ESC victory in Malmö, the Swiss singer turned away when the Israeli singer Eden Golan, who was booed on stage, tried to congratulate him. Shortly before his performance, Nemo joined other ESC artists in criticizing the “current situation in the occupied Palestinian territories (especially Gaza) and in Israel”. He later campaigned for Palestine on Instagram on various occasions. It was reported that Nemo had already campaigned behind the scenes for Israel to be excluded from the competition in 2024.

No one would have expected Nemo to use the musical stage to make political statements. Neither Beatrice Egli nor Luca Hänni are known to do anything similar.

But Nemo Mettler is quite certain: “I don’t believe that anything in the world can be apolitical.” The war in Gaza has been on his mind a lot (“because I’ve been dealing with the issue very closely”). The singer from Biel confided to “Magazin”: “One thing has already given me food for thought over the past year: that we – including me! – are thinking more and more in black and white.”

“A little swastika embroidered”

However, Nemo does not seem to realize that the Middle East conflict in particular cannot be dealt with in woodcut-like black and white. And yet there is a whole palette of shades of gray and nuances when it comes to this topic. A little more sensitivity on the subject of the boycott of Jewish artists and the Jewish state of Israel would be especially appropriate in view of Nemo’s family history. If Nemo, with his many fans and as an internationally heard voice, is to contribute to the Middle East conflict, he must be aware that the existence of the state of Israel is linked to the genocide of the Jews. And he must take into account the history of his family, which supported National Socialism intellectually, actively and financially, i.e. the murderous ideology that made this genocide possible in the first place.

Because Nemo ignores this past, he has to put up with the accusation of hypocritical superficiality. Or the even worse accusation that he is continuing a sinister family tradition. The politicizing Nemo should actually know about this, as it is public knowledge. The Mettler family of entrepreneurs from St. Gallen, of which Nemo is a member, has long since been the subject of research by renowned historians, most tirelessly by a certain Niklaus Meienberg.

Nemo Mettler’s direct ancestor was the textile industrialist Arnold Mettler from St. Gallen, married to the merchant’s daughter Elsa Specker and blessed with five children. Originally from Toggenburg, the Mettlers quickly became part of the city’s leading circles thanks to the production and trade of fine fabrics for the embroidery industry. They lived in the “Freia” villa on the elegant Rosenberg, surrounded by a valuable art collection, a tennis court and several riding horses.

Always Germanophiles, the Mettler-Specker couple became ardent admirers of National Socialism. In the end, the entrepreneur was only known as “Hitler-Mettler” in the vernacular. He sat on the board of the fascist “Neue Basler Zeitung”, which was later banned by the Federal Council. Just like this newspaper, Mettler-Specker financially supported right-wing extremist groups such as the “National Front”, the “Bund treuer Eidgenossen” and the “Eidgenössische Soziale Arbeiterpartei”.

His wife Elsa Mettler-Specker was committed to the bourgeois women's movement, served for many years as president of the St. Gallen Women's Center and was a board member of the Federation of Swiss Women's Associations. From 1935, she also found a new purpose in life in the National Socialist world view instead of her Christian faith. She refused to take part in a fundraising campaign by Swiss women's organizations for Jewish refugees on the grounds that "Swiss Jews have so much money that they could easily help their suffering fellow believers". According to "Sankt Galler Geschichte 2003", the Mettler-Specker couple dreamed of an "authoritarian Europe under fascist leadership".

The St. Gallen "Volksstimme" fought Mettler-Specker's frontist activities most resolutely. Walter Lötscher, a great-uncle of the author of this article, was the editor of this social democratic newspaper. The SP newspaper described the liberal-minded cantonal councillor Mettler-Specker as a "fundamental wage reducer". After the wealthy factory owner had also cut the incomes of employees in the canton – many of whom were Liberals – a storm of protest arose to such an extent that he resigned prematurely from parliament and the board of the municipal FDP in 1934. Mettler-Specker announced that he had resigned from office "in order to devote himself more to charitable work in future". However, the Volksstimme mocked ironically: "Other people think he wants to devote himself more to the fronts, which are also very charitable activities..."

The left-wing St. Gallen journalist Niklaus Meienberg not only wrote about the unskilled worker and traitor Ernst Schrämli, who was shot for espionage. He also dealt with factory owner Arnold Mettler-Specker, whom he considered more dangerous than Schrämli. Mettler-Specker had financed bail for five prominent fascists who had been arrested as traitors to the country. They all used their unexpected freedom to get to Germany. Meienberg wrote about this: "If you thread all these relationships together, you get a real St. Gallen embroidery, a charming fabric from the thirties and forties, and sometimes a swastika is embroidered into it."

The textile owner Mettler-Specker continued to finance right-wing extremist movements even after he had long been under observation by the federal police. Together with his hunting friend, police inspector Carl Kappeler – who attended the Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg in 1938 – he presented two magnificent ibex from the St. Gallen Game Park to Reich Marshal and Reich Hunting Master Hermann Göring via the German consul. After a public storm of indignation, Kappeler was given early retirement. The comparison between the shot Schrämli and the largely

unmolested Mettler-Specker prompted the eminent Swiss historian Edgar Bonjour to conclude: “The smaller one is more likely to hang than the larger one.”

Arnold Mettler-Specker feared the Bolshevik revolution, advocated vigilante groups and increasingly also anti-Jewish, eugenicist-racist convictions. The Nazi enthusiasm of the Chairman of the Board of Directors of his family business had a detrimental effect on the company’s business by 1938 at the latest. Not least because economic relationships with Jewish companies also played a considerable role in the national and international textile trade.

SS-Sturmmann Mettler

When summoned by the police, the industrialist stated on record that he had been “made aware that Marxism was a Jewish movement”. In December 1938, a police search was carried out at Mettler-Specker’s villa, but “no criminal acts by the aforementioned could be proven”.

Nevertheless, the measure was now full: on January 5, 1939, the company Mettler & Co. AG published the statement that Mettler-Specker had resigned “due to political aberration” and had been replaced by his son Arnold. He also had to leave the Board of Directors of the insurance company Helvetia. Meienberg’s conclusion in comparison with the fate of traitor Ernst Schrämli was: “At the top they retired, at the bottom they were falsified.”

Mettler-Specker was also one of the signatories of the infamous “Petition of 200” in 1940. With their signatures, 173 Swiss-German citizens called for the “eradication” of press organs critical of the Nazis and the “removal” of the people concerned. The prominent St. Gallen native did not live to see the storm of public indignation when the Federal Council made this defeatist petition public in 1946.

Arnold Mettler-Specker held on to his belief in Hitler’s Greater Germany until the very end. He dismissed rumors about the extermination of the Jews as atrocity propaganda. But he knew who was being referred to when the Social Democrats demanded in May 1945 that Nazi sympathizers be held accountable and that the “executive floors of industry” be purged. Arnold Mettler-Specker shot himself on May 26, 1945, two and a half weeks after the Allied victory.

Anti-Semitism was also a tradition in Arnold Mettler-Specker’s family. His son, the lawyer Kurt Mettler, who died in 1930, had written in his diary about a “stinking

ghetto” and the sight of emigrants during a trip to the USA: “I didn’t like them. All kinds of unpleasant Jews.” He also noted: “Perhaps it would be good if every country had a dictator.”

The youngest son, Hannes Martin Mettler, born in 1916, was also a fanatical National Socialist. As a 25-year-old medical student, he unlawfully enlisted in the German Waffen-SS in Berlin. There he underwent training as a “Sturmmann” in the 9th SS regiment in the Heinrich Himmler barracks in Prague-Rusin. He wrote to his parents for the last time on June 24, 1941: “Should I not return from his Russia, take this as your last greeting.” Do not worry, and do not think that my death was in vain or premature. What are we but leaves on a tree – what does it matter if one withers and falls? If only the tree grows.” Mettler’s lines before his deployment in the German war of extermination on the Eastern Front were exploited for propaganda purposes by the SS Main Office as “Letters from Germanic war volunteers”.

“Conviction gave you heroism!”

Hannes Martin Mettler was one of the first Swiss volunteers for “Greater Germania” to fall on Ukrainian soil during the Battle of Kiev. The people of St. Gallen were informed of this in an obituary: “Hannes Martin Mettler met his untimely death near Kiev on September 14, 1941”. According to the former St. Gallen city archivist Ernst Ziegler, the family actually wanted to include the text modules “bravely fighting for the Führer” and “in proud mourning”. However, the editors of the “St. Galler Tagblatt” successfully intervened with the advertising department. But father Arnold Mettler-Specker wrote about the “spontaneous sacrificial death” of his youngest: “You felt seeing that Europe was sick, / You knew to thank the German Führer / For national community, honor, blood, / Conviction gave you heroism!”

Elsewhere, Mettler-Specker wrote about the fallen son: “After a long search, he found his inner liberation through Adolf Hitler. […] The realization of the terrible danger that Europe was in of being overrun by Bolshevism left him no peace.” Whether and how many Russian “subhumans” the St. Gallen SS volunteer had previously killed and whether he participated in war crimes is unknown.

The Biel singer Nemo Mettler is therefore the offspring of a “perhaps not good, but rich family” (city archivist Ziegler). Last autumn, he traveled to the capital of Ukraine for a concert “despite ongoing attacks on the city” (Blick) and wrote about his picture from a cellar: “I slept in the hotel shelter while Kiev was under fire all night. This kind of night has become a sad reality for so many of my Ukrainian

friends.” However, unlike his great-uncle, SS-Sturmmann Hannes Martin Mettler, Nemo Mettler did not remain on a battlefield near Kiev in his musical fight against the Russian enemy.

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