



If you have such party friends, you don't need enemies

From Markus Somm

If there was one thing that always preoccupied Helmut Hubacher, the former SP president, it was the Holocaust. Whether it was because his mother was German or because one of his role models was Walther Bringolf, a Social Democrat who had helped some Jewish refugees during the war, which he was able to do because he was mayor of Schaffhausen, I don't know. But every time we met, and that often happened when I was editor-in-chief of the "Basler Zeitung", we talked about the civilizational collapse of half his homeland. If I wrote about it, for example in a portrait of a Holocaust survivor, he would praise me; if I warned against anti-Semitism, he would agree with me; if I conducted an interview with an Israeli intellectual, he would ask: What was he like, what did he say? Hubacher also knew Willy Brandt well, the chancellor of the SPD, and he was happy to tell me why he appreciated Switzerland so much: "You know, Helmut, we'll never forget how you welcomed us as emigrants." Although Brandt had found refuge from the Nazis in Scandinavia at the time, he was aware of what Switzerland had achieved. Brandt was free of the leftist conceit that we had only failed.

In fact, the SPS had done itself a great service. It stood up for the refugees from the Third Reich like no other party, while the bourgeoisie took note of the catastrophe in the north rather meekly and reluctantly. Defensiveness prevailed where much more courage and compassion would have been necessary. When Switzerland closed its borders in 1942, which meant a death sentence for many Jews, the Social Democrats fought back in parliament, and when it came to helping those unfortunates who nevertheless made it into our country, Social Democrats were at the forefront of their efforts.

I was reminded of this when it was announced on Thursday that the Zurich SP would no longer be nominating its Council of States member Daniel Jositsch for re-election. Jositsch is Jewish – and one of the things he was accused of was that he had spoken out against funding for UNRWA, the UN's largely anti-Semitic aid organization for Palestinian refugees. Of course, he also rejected the left-wing extremist accusation that Israel had committed "genocide" in Gaza, which is a standard refrain in Young Socialist circles but, as Figura shows, has now also reached the mainstream of the SP. Of course, there were a few other "deviations" from the party line that Jositsch was accused of, but the fact remains: the party that once fought so bravely against anti-Semitism no longer wants to know anything about it. Israel is being put on the same level as the Third Reich by accusing the Jewish state of all things of "genocide". It is an epochal break.



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The SP is likely to pay a high price for this. Whether the delegates were aware of this is beyond me; if not, then it would be symptomatic of a party that used to study history almost obsessively, but today stumbles through politics blind to history. If a section of the middle classes has flocked to the SP since 1968, it was also because only the SP, it seemed to these rebels from good families, had remained decent during the Nazi era. Although this was an import from Germany, where some young members of the elite turned to the SPD for precisely this reason, which was understandable, it was grotesque in Switzerland, especially as the bourgeoisie here had by no means become Nazis, but had defended the country and democracy. Nevertheless, the SP benefited from this. The '68ers transformed the party. Today it is a left-wing bourgeois movement as far as its social profile is concerned, even if it becomes more socialist the more academic and intolerant it becomes.

Swiss Jews play no role in politics. The SP doesn't need them. But the party has lost its nimbus of being one of the decent ones. Hubacher weeps.

This commentary by Nebelspalter editor-in-chief Markus Somm first appeared in the SonntagsZeitung.