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WILDWHINE

This week, there was a book presentation in Vienna, Austria, about ‘race, as a political and social construction’. One of the panelists at the event is Prof. Wolfgang Benz, head of the Center for Research on Antisemitism (ZfA) at Berlin’s Technical University. Benz has recently come under heavy criticism because he currently equates anti-Semitism with criticism of Islamism.

It started with a conference on December 8, 2008 at his institute in Berlin, entitled “concept of the enemy Muslim – concept of the enemy Jew.” The announcement itself drew clear parallels from the history of anti-Semitism in the 19th century and today’s situation for Muslims.

Well: who was attacked on 9/11? Who organizes conferences like

“A World without Zionism” and denies the Holocaust? And who, by the way, organizes rallies in the heart of Berlin as well as in San Francisco, London or any other major city in the Western world in January 2009 screaming “Death to the Jews”, “Olmert is a son of a dog”, or “ Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the Gas?”

Who gave some of the nastiest, most anti-Semitic and anti-American speeches at the United Nations in the last years at their General Assemblies in September? Are these examples proof for “Islamophobia?”

The analogy of anti-Semitism and “Islamophobia” is also the topic of another conference at an Academy in the city of Tutzing, south of Munich in Bavaria, on January 21-23, organized in collaboration with the “Moses Mendelssohn Center for European-Jewish Studies at the University of Potsdam (MMZ).” The announcement also compares the history of 19th century anti-Semitism with criticism of Islam. The flyer for this event mentions Heinrich von Treitschke, one of the most dangerous and influential anti-Semites ever. He coined the term “Die Juden sind unser Unglück” (“Jews are our Misfortune”), decades later a key term for the Nazi movement and Nazi Germany itself.



The Tutzing event draws a clear line from German pre-Nazi style anti-Semitism of Treitschke in the late 19th century to

today's criticism of Islamism, Islamic Jihad and Islamic Terrorism. Some participants are asked to talk about anti-Semitism, others about criticism of Islam. One participant is striking: a Dr. Mohammed Khallouk, representing the "General Council of German Muslims" (ZMD). He wrote in 2010 that some critics of Islamism like feminist, Muslim authors Necla Kelek or Seyran Ates just criticize Islam in order to prepare Muslims to convert to Christianity respective Judaism!

There can be no doubt, that this is an anti-Semitic (and anti-Christian) conspiracy theory. Kelek and Ates are known as intellectuals who are courageous when criticizing Islamism. Ates, formerly working as a lawyer, was almost shot dead several years ago. She survived and is well known for her books that urge Muslims to wake up to extremist realities.



Other panels of that Tutzing conference compare or equate debates about the building of synagogues in the 19th century with mosques projects today. This is, again, a denial of any specificity of the history of anti-Semitism. Judaism is not a big and imperialistic religion like Islam or Christianity, without forgetting that Christianity, contrary to Islam has had more than 200 years of enlightenment so far. Judaism did not spread terror and hatred and anti-democratic ideology when planning synagogues in Germany let's say in 1893. Many Muslims today are known to support Hamas. In Germany many of them are serving Turkish-Islamist AKP-ideology, directly managed by the Turkish government. Such mosque projects are sometimes also financed by Saudi or other Arab sources and incorporate their anti-Western, anti-Israeli, and anti-Semitic ideology. This is all well known and analyzed. When scholars, politicians and activists today claim that criticism of Islam or Islamism reminds them of anti-Semitism, this is a distortion of history. It is also an obfuscation of the Holocaust – because 19th century German anti-Semitism led to the Shoah. If today's

criticism of Islam has similarities to 19th century Jew hatred, Muslims are a few years or decades away from a "Holocaust," according to this relativist fashionable thought.

Finally, back to Prof. Benz, who is on the forefront of the equation of anti-Semitism and "Islamophobia," and is silent about his own history. He is on the board of a "Yearbook on Islamophobia", published in Austria. He received a Ph.D. in history in 1968 at the University of Munich under the auspices of Prof. Karl Bosl. Bosl was member of the Nazi party (NSDAP), the "Sturmabteilung" (SA), and was later paid by the "Schutzstaffel" (SS) in a scholarly project. On January 16 and 17, 1945, Bosl took part in the (probably) last conference of historians in Nazi Germany. This was a conference of the infamous "Aktion Ritterbusch," a huge scholarly organization of Nazi historians. To underline their sympathy with the "Führer," Adolf Hitler, this conference was held in Braunau am Inn, Hitler's birthplace.



Bosl was also active in anti-Semitic circles after 1945. In 1964 he gave a talk at a revisionist conference of the "Witikobund," equating the Holocaust with the expulsion of Germans from the East after the end of the Second World War. In 1990, three years before Bosl died, he gave a long biographical interview. Asked about his time during Nazi Germany, he said, "I was not at all involved." Bosl was member of several academic organizations and is still honored worldwide. He was a member of the Medieval Academy of America (Cambridge/Mass.). In November 2008 the Bavarian city of Cham established a "Prof.-Dr.-Karl-Bosl-Place," and in July 2009 the Bavarian association of Philologists for the first time awarded their "Karl-Bosl Medal."

Prof. Benz congratulated Bosl on his 80th birthday in 1988 by contributing to a volume in honor of Bosl. In 1990 Benz became head of the Center for Research on Antisemitism (ZfA). At an event in the city of Erlangen on March 21, 2010, Benz was asked what he thinks about Bosl's Nazi legacy. Benz said: "Bosl was not a Nazi."