

Berlin teacher hits pupil for supporting fellow student holding Palestinian flag

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At the Ernst-Abbe High School in Berlin's Neukölln district, a teacher punched a 15-year-old student in the face on Monday because he had expressed solidarity with a younger student carrying a Palestinian flag. The teacher had previously snatched the flag from the younger student's hands, whereupon he was confronted by the older student.

The case is a frightening illustration of how the media and official politics, with their omnipresent warmongering against the Palestinian people, have created a climate that fuels and legitimises violence against immigrant youth. False reporting on the assault, the silence of the school administration and police action against protesting parents and students shows how systematically this is being pushed.

There can be no doubt about what the teacher did. It is recorded on video which clearly shows how the teacher gave the student a violent blow to the head, against which the student defended himself with a kick. Many eyewitnesses have also confirmed the course of events.

The teacher's outrageous use of force and the indifferent reaction of the school administration were condemned on social media by tens of thousands of students and supporters. A petition initiated by students at the high school received 3,837 signatures within three days.

It reads: "This is not only a violation of every child's right to a safe educational environment, but also a clear example of abuse of power. It is unacceptable for school staff to be unable to control their emotions and become violent—but it is even worse that such acts go without further consequences."

In fact, the student was suspended for several days, while the teacher was merely put on "sick leave" for a short time and continues to teach without

consequences. In response to a written press request asking for comment on the incident, the Ernst-Abbe school officials referred the *World Socialist Web Site* to the press office of the Berlin state Department for Education, Youth and Family Affairs.

The students' petition calls for "a thorough investigation of this incident as well as appropriate action against the teacher involved" and demands better guidelines "to ensure a safe learning environment at this school." Many signatories wrote comments condemning the assault and calling for consequences for the teacher.

"Teachers should always act pedagogically and in an exemplary manner," Mona K., for example, wrote under her signature. "But this is a case of bodily harm to someone for whom the school has a duty of care! Acting like this in a teacher's function because of a flag should be prosecuted. His unjust, inappropriate behaviour towards the student cannot be justified in any way. I wish the student well. He is not to blame; he did everything right!"

Eya S. condemned the appalling "level of pedagogical and social incompetence" and wrote: "So much for 'democratic plurality' and the neutrality of state employees. Shame on the 'teacher' and those in charge of this school's bureaucracy... Suspending someone for expressing an opinion or obvious self-defence shows shameless exploitation of one's own power. But this is nothing new among supporters of Israel."

Immediately after the incident, the teacher claimed to have reacted in the heat of the moment to a "headbutt" by the student. This version of the incident was immediately adopted uncritically by the police and the media, although it was categorically denied to the press by all the students present.

On Tuesday, parents' representative M. El-Houschi also testified to broadcaster RBB that the violence had clearly come from the teacher. None of the many students present could confirm a previous headbutt by the pupil: "The pupil was acting in self-defence."

A fortnight ago, the same teacher had made a pupil "who was wearing a necklace with the Palestine flag" cry and "kicked her out of the class," El-Houschi told RBB. "He told her to put the necklace away. She didn't understand why. He ran provocatively after her when she wanted to go to the toilet and took her crying to the school administration."

The parents' association of the Ernst-Abbe-Gymnasium then announced a demonstration in front of the school building on Wednesday morning under the motto "No place for racism, no place for violence." The Berlin police immediately banned the demonstration and mobilised 150 officers to enforce the ban. The police arrived with squad cars and temporarily detained several youths. Private security guards were also deployed against students and parents.

The demonstrators complied with the police's instructions and even moved the meeting to another location, although there is supposed to be freedom of assembly in front of school buildings. But even the spontaneous rally was broken up by the police at noon. Photos show several students being taken away by police officers.

The media and police outdid themselves with their Orwellian distortions and used the incident as an opportunity to escalate police terror and the media smear campaign against the Palestinian population.

The police justified their ban on the protest by claiming that there could be "inciting, anti-Semitic shouts, glorification of violence and acts of violence." In its report on the police intervention, the *Berliner Zeitung* claims in an insertion that the chant "Free Palestine" uttered by the students was "not a peace slogan, but a call for violence against Israel" and was tantamount to a demand for the "extermination of the Jewish state."

On the same day, the police used a massive deployment and numerous arrests to crack down on other gatherings in Berlin's immigrant-dominated districts of Neukölln, Mitte and Kreuzberg. Two demonstrations announced by Palestinian supporters at Pariser Platz and Richardplatz were banned by the

police. At Hermannplatz in Neukölln, police failed to suppress the protest of hundreds of participants despite numerous custodial interventions.

Another demonstration registered for Thursday to show "solidarity with the civilian population in the Gaza Strip" was also banned by the Berlin authorities responsible. Police turned up at Potsdamer Platz with a dozen emergency vehicles and around 80 officers to enforce the ban on the gathering.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on all workers to take action against the genocidal war that the Netanyahu government is unleashing against the Palestinian people with the full support of the imperialist powers. A socialist movement of the international working class has never been more urgent. We also call on teachers to condemn the violent attack at Ernst-Abbe High School, to defend the democratic rights of all students and to condemn the decades of bloody oppression of the Palestinians.



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