

Jewish intellectuals call for “freedom of dissent”

Marianne Arens
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Hundreds of thousands have been taking to the streets worldwide for days against the genocide of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In Germany, the government, which supports the Netanyahu regime’s war against the Palestinians, has banned any opposition in its own country to this genocidal action.

An encouraging sign is an Open Letter signed by more than a hundred Jewish artists, writers and academics to defend expressions of solidarity with the Palestinians in Germany. “For the Freedom of Dissent” is the title of this Open Letter, which was published by n+1 in English and on the homepage of the *taz* newspaper in German.

The letter bears the names of 110 signatories, including Jewish writers, poets, journalists and publishers, scientists, teachers and professors, filmmakers, theatre and radio producers, photographers and photojournalists, musicians and composers, visual artists, designers, dancers and choreographers. In the letter, they “condemn a disturbing crackdown on civic life in the wake of this month’s horrifying violence in Israel and Palestine,” as the first paragraph states.

At the outset, they also criticise the “terrorist attacks on civilians by Hamas,” because “Many of us have family and friends in Israel who have been directly affected by this violence.” But they then clearly state, “We condemn with equal force the killing of civilians in Gaza.”

The letter then turns to recent events in Germany, where for weeks the authorities “have banned public gatherings with presumed Palestinian sympathies.” On this, the letter says: “The police have offered no credible defense of these decisions.” Instead, the bans serve to “suppress legitimate nonviolent political expression that may include criticisms of Israel.”

Criticising the “indiscriminate brutality” of the

police, the letter says the authorities “have targeted immigrant and minority populations across Germany, harassing, arresting, and beating civilians, often on the flimsiest of pretexts.”

The district of Neukölln, in Berlin, home to large Turkish and Arab communities, is now a neighborhood under police occupation. Armored vans and squads of armed riot police patrol the streets searching for any spontaneous showing of Palestinian support or symbols of Palestinian identity. Pedestrians are shoved and pepper-sprayed at random on the sidewalk. Children are ruthlessly tackled and arrested. Those detained and arrested include well-known Syrian and Palestinian activists.

The letter also criticises the banning of Palestinian flags and keffiyeh (Palestinian scarves) from schools—a ban that is enforced with police violence and arrests. Examples are also given of recent cases where even perfectly peaceful organisations such as “Youth against Racism” and “Jewish Berliners against Violence in the Middle East” have been punished for their statements. The arrest of a Jewish Israeli woman “for holding a sign denouncing the war her country is waging” is cited as a particularly absurd case.

The signatories of the letter explicitly distance themselves from the cowardly behaviour of the “cultural elites in Germany” who, under the pretext of protecting Jews and the state of Israel, have “silenced themselves as if synchronised.” “As Jews, we reject this pretext for racist violence and express full solidarity with our Arab, Muslim, and particularly our Palestinian neighbors. We refuse to live in prejudicial fear. What frightens us is the prevailing atmosphere of racism and xenophobia in Germany, hand in hand with a constraining and paternalistic philo-Semitism.”

Then follows the significant sentence: “We reject in

particular the conflation of anti-Semitism and any criticism of the state of Israel.”

This letter clearly sums up the mendacious propaganda currently being spread in Germany and shared by all parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament) and the major media outlets. In the Bundestag, all parties—from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) to the Left Party—have taken Israel’s side. They have unreservedly declared their support for Israel’s “right to self-defence,” which in reality is tantamount to justifying the starvation, killing and expulsion of Palestinians. Any criticism of this policy is being actively suppressed.

The protest by Jewish intellectuals conspicuously counteracts the cynical lie that the “fight against anti-Semitism” demands unconditional support for Israel’s policy of war and violence. The signatories courageously take the side of the oppressed Palestinians. In Germany, they demand the right to freedom of expression and assembly for all, invoking Rosa Luxemburg’s famous saying that freedom is “always freedom of dissent.”

To the shame of the *taz* editors, it should be added that this newspaper, which is close to the Greens, could not print the open letter unchallenged. It felt obliged to publish criticism of the Open Letter by a guest commentator from the *Jüdische Allgemeine* weekly paper under the title “You trivialise anti-Semitism.” The critic cannot accept that the signatories of the letter refuse to equate any criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism and portrays the authors and signatories of the Open Letter as “privileged” Jews who “did not leave their home countries out of necessity” and “did not flee from anti-Semitism.”

Nevertheless, the open letter is a courageous and encouraging voice against the generally predominant war propaganda. It corresponds to the mood prevailing in the growing demonstrations against war and fascism, in which more and more young workers understand that imperialism uses the “anti-Semitism” charge as a baseless slur to silence anyone fighting for democratic rights, equality and socialism.



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