

The genocide in Gaza and the attack on the right to demonstrate in Germany

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Germany's "Basic Law" (constitution) gives everyone the right "without registration or authorisation, to assemble peacefully and without weapons" (Article 8) and to "freely express and disseminate their opinions in speech, writing and images. There shall be no censorship" (Article 5).

The extent to which government and the security authorities disregard these basic democratic rights is breathtaking. Demonstrations against the genocide in Gaza are being banned or subjected to strict conditions. Large police contingents intimidate participants, censor every spoken and written word, arrest participants by the dozens and confiscate flyers and banners.

According to a survey by news weekly *Der Spiegel*, a quarter of all registered pro-Palestinian demonstrations in the 20 largest German cities were banned. The rest took place under conditions of harassment that stipulated in detail what could and could not be said and shown. The restrictions are reminiscent of the "Newspeak" in George Orwell's novel *1984*, which is intended to ensure the correct world view and mindset "by eliminating undesirable words." These conditions differ from city to city and are characterised by complete arbitrariness on the part of the state.

Even exclamations such as "from the river to the sea" have been categorised as "antisemitic, inciting hatred, glorifying violence or terror" and banned. In Berlin, where around 20,000 participants gathered on Saturday for the largest demonstration to date, the police had issued an extensive catalogue of restrictions. Anyone who denied Israel's right to exist would be committing a criminal offence, which would be punished immediately, warned head of operations Stephan Klatt, threatening to break up the demonstration in the event of a repeat offence.

Symbols, flags and proclamations, as well as expressing support for Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the recently banned prisoner aid organisation Samidoun, were also prohibited. Palestinian scarves and Palestine flags were allowed but could be confiscated if they were used "in support" of banned

slogans.

The police deployed 1,000 officers to monitor the restrictions and intervene immediately if they were violated. The security forces were rigorous in their approach. According to the police, 68 arrests were made in connection with the demonstration and 36 investigations were initiated.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) was also affected by the repression. Leaflets with the statement "Stop the imperialist-Zionist genocide in Gaza!" which it distributed at the demonstration were confiscated for half an hour until the police censors finally released them again.

In other cities, the conditions were even more restrictive. Anyone who wanted to demonstrate in Frankfurt am Main against the massacre in Gaza needed courage. The demonstration on Rathenau-Platz, which was attended by around 800 people, was cordoned off on two sides by police vans. On the narrow sides there were groups of police in helmets and armoured vests next to police film crews recording every movement. The rally speech, given by a Muslim woman from Bavaria, was interrupted several times by a disembodied voice over police loudspeakers, with the constant threat that the rally would be broken up if this or that poster was not removed immediately.

Posters showing dead people and children's corpses, posters with the words, "genocide" or "Völkermord" and negative references to Israel were banned. Palestine flags were also banned, but in view of the large number of such flags, the police refrained from enforcing the ban.

At a smaller demonstration in Duisburg, the police also banned the distribution of pictures showing nothing but the truth. These were images of injured children, women and men in hospitals in the Gaza Strip, as can be seen every day on Al Jazeera and even occasionally on BBC, which, unlike ARD and ZDF, do not completely bow to government censorship.

Representatives of the police felt that the drastic restrictions on freedom of demonstration and freedom of expression did not go far enough. On Monday, the chairman

of the Police Officers Union, Jochen Kopelke, called for only small, stationary demonstrations with a limited number of participants to be permitted.

Kopelke told Deutschlandfunk radio that the crowds currently taking to the streets at Gaza demonstrations could not be controlled. “All assembly authorities must be more restrictive and impose more conditions. These marches through German cities should no longer be allowed.” Large demonstrations were not “manageable” for the police. “The crowds are so big that we police officers can’t be in all places at once, of course. But if we discover something illegal, we crack down hard.”

Rainer Wendt from the smaller German Police Officers Union agitated in the *Bild* tabloid: “The radical Islamists are posing the question of power on our streets, and we have to answer it in our favour, otherwise it will no longer be the Basic Law that rules, but Sharia law.”

Media outlets reacted to the demonstrations with undisguised hostility. They began by absurdly understating the number of participants. For example, they reported figures of between 6,000 and 8,000 for the Berlin demonstration, although the number of participants was obviously at least three times as high.

None of the demonstrators, including Jews who were peacefully protesting against the massacre by the Israeli army, were mentioned in the brief reports. Instead, the reporting focused on how many “criminal offences”—i.e., violations of the undemocratic restrictions—had taken place.

As usual, *Bild*, the inflammatory newspaper from the Springer publishing group, went the furthest, unleashing a veritable pogrom of incitement. *Bild* reported on the Berlin “Jew-hating demonstration” under the headline “Thousands shout: ‘Bomb Israel!’” In reality, not a single participant in the demonstration had “shouted” anything of the sort. The demonstrators had chanted “Israel bombs, Germany finances.”

But no lie is too shabby for *Bild* to agitate against political opponents. In 1968, the tabloid had created a pogrom atmosphere against the student movement which led to the assassination attempt on its leader Rudi Dutschke. *Bild*’s lies about the Berlin demonstration clearly fulfill the criminal offence of incitement to hatred. But the Springer paper, whose annual press ball is attended by the *crème de la crème* of Berlin’s political and media scene, need not fear that the public prosecutor will knock on its door.

Moreover, the agitation is not limited to the tabloid press. German professors also do not shy away from digging deep into the brown (Nazi) filth when it comes to stirring up hatred against Muslims.

Professor Ruud Koopmans from Berlin’s Humboldt University tweeted on X: “Maybe it’s time to make ‘Allahu

Akbar!’ a punishable battle cry at demonstrations. It’s used 100 percent equivalently to the Nazis’ ‘Sieg heil!’”

The Arabic “Allahu Akbar” means “God is great” and is used by hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world. It leads Friday prayers every week. Arabic-speaking Christians also use this phrase. The social scientist Koopmans had previously made a name for himself with questionable studies that declared almost half of European Muslims to be fundamentalists.

In an interview with the *Frankfurter Neue Presse*, Susanne Schröter, head of the Frankfurt Research Centre for Global Islam, who is also well known for her anti-Muslim stance, stirs up an amalgam of pro-Palestinian demonstrators, “extremely violent” Islamists, “Marxist, Leninist, Trotskyist groups from the pro-Palestine bloc” and representatives of “post-colonial theory,” who are “irreconcilably against Israel, against the West.” She calls for bans and influence on public opinion.

The massive attack on the right to demonstrate and freedom of expression, which is supported by the major parties, the media and formerly liberal representatives of the wealthy upper middle class, cannot be explained by the war in Gaza alone. It is the reaction of a ruling class that feels increasingly isolated and threatened by the masses.

Despite the intensive media campaign, it has not succeeded in suppressing resistance to the genocide of the Palestinians. The protests against it are growing from week to week and have long since taken on an international character. Last weekend, millions took to the streets worldwide.

The resistance against war and oppression comes together with the intensification of the international class struggle. A powerful international movement is developing that can overthrow capitalism—the cause of war and oppression—if it is armed with a socialist programme. The attacks on freedom of expression and the right to demonstrate are directed against this.



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