

Germany taking police state measures against Gaza protests

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6 December 2023

The reaction of the German state to pro-Palestinian protests betrays the ruling class's fear of a mass movement of the working class against war and exploitation. Protests, rallies, and demonstrations, even texts and cartoons that call Israel's genocide in the Gaza Strip by its name, are banned and violently suppressed.

The experience of Piter Minnemann, a survivor of the fascist Hanau killings who dared to post a cartoon criticising Israel on Instagram, is a particularly blatant case. The state responded with a police raid on the 22-year-old's flat.

Minnemann, a guest at the Arena Bar in Hanau-Kesselstadt, barely survived the attack on February 19, 2020, in which nine people were shot dead. He had witnessed how a racist known to the authorities shot four of his friends in cold blood. Since then, he has fought tirelessly for a full investigation into the circumstances of the crime. From the outset, the notoriously right-wing police apparatus in Hesse has hindered rather than supported him.

As Minnemann reported to the TRTDeutsch website, at least five police officers forced their way into his flat at six o'clock in the morning on Wednesday, November 22. They restrained him and opened the door for other officers. They presented him with a warrant from the Hanau district court to search his home, ransacked it and confiscated his mobile phone.

The reason given was a cartoon that Piter had shared on the internet after the invasion of Gaza by Israeli forces, which allegedly fuelled "suspicion of incitement to hatred." The cartoon depicts an IDF soldier pointing his rifle at a Palestinian woman wearing a headscarf. At the same time, he sees in the mirror a Nazi henchman with a swastika aiming at an emaciated (Jewish) person. The accompanying text: "The irony of becoming what you once hated."

The depiction, which is now banned everywhere, makes

it artistically clear how much the current actions of the Israeli army against the Palestinians are reminiscent of the actions of the SS during the evacuation of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943. The IDF killed more than 1,000 people at the weekend alone after the ceasefire in Gaza ended and bombed entire city blocks of Khan Yunis. A total of 2.25 million people are being starved, shot and driven towards the Sinai desert.

But in Germany it is forbidden to talk about it, write about it, draw about it or even protest against the genocide. Demonstrations are repeatedly banned, or they are obstructed and harassed by the police, posters are confiscated, and participants charged with "suspected incitement of the people."

A shop with a pro-Palestinian sign in its window at Bonn Central Station has been charged with "incitement of the people" and the sign was confiscated by the police without a court order. The shop has now put a poster in its shop window with the protest: "Does the rule of law still exist?!!!"

Germany's constitution states: "Everyone has the right to freely express and disseminate their opinion in speech, writing and pictures (...) There is no censorship." It also states: "All Germans have the right to assemble peacefully and without weapons without registration or authorisation," and the right to inviolability of the home is also expressly enshrined in the constitution.

These basic rights are now being trampled underfoot. They do not apply when Palestinian and Jewish activists and their supporters call for an end to the genocide in Gaza.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) has also been affected by police bans on several occasions. Last Saturday, for example, posters with the demand "Stop the genocide in Gaza" were to be banned in Düsseldorf. They were finally authorised following a decision by the Münster Higher

Administrative Court. SGP flyers with the call: “Stop the imperialist-Zionist genocide in Gaza!” were repeatedly confiscated by the police at demonstrations.

A violent example of arbitrary police actions took place at the University of Cologne on November 22. A pro-Palestinian rally was organised in front of the university building under the title: “Peace for Palestine—stop the expulsions! Together against repression and witch-hunts!”

The university management had already announced in advance that it would “not tolerate any anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli statements on our campus” and was in “close contact with the police and the city of Cologne.” At the same time, the Cologne German-Israeli Society (DIG) and local newspapers the *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* and *Kölnische Rundschau* spread completely unfounded rumours about alleged “intimidation” of Jewish students and imminent “criminal acts on campus.”

The initiators of the rally had expressly rejected the accusation of antisemitism. In their statement, they had not only defended Palestine-solidarity activists, Palestinians and “Arabs and Muslims,” but also explicitly defended Jews against repression and agitation.

Despite all this, the police swamped the rally, which comprised around 200 participants, with meticulous controls, arbitrary harassment and criminal charges. All signs, banners and flyers had to be presented to the police before they could be displayed.

A press release from the organisers lists numerous police infringements during the rally, including “harassing measures” such as the displacement of the assembly to a place “away from the main entrance between construction fences and concrete,” as well as the confiscation of many flyers and posters, sometimes without justification. Criminal charges were brought against the organiser of the assembly for chanting a slogan that included the phrase “Solidarity until victory.”

Leaflets and banners from several organisations were confiscated, including those of the SGP. The WSWs statement “Mobilise the working class against the imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza” was confiscated without justification, with a police officer snatching a whole stack of flyers from the distributor. A little later, another SGP leaflet was also confiscated away from the rally. The leaflet contained another WSWs article entitled “Israel’s war on hospitals and the normalisation of war crimes.”

Printed material and banners from other organisations, such as Communist Organisation (KO) and Socialist

Alternative (SAV), were also confiscated. The SAV banner bore the inscription: “Gaza—Stop the massacre. For the unity of the working class against occupation, poverty & capitalism.” Images “calling for a stop to the war or showing the outline of Palestine throughout history” and a sign reading “Stop G*n**de” were also confiscated by the police, all on the blanket grounds that there was an “initial suspicion of incitement to hatred.”

These examples clearly illustrate how fragile Germany’s democratic façade is and how quickly the state is prepared to abandon the constitution. Above all, they show the panic-stricken fear of those in power that resistance to war and oppression will come together with the international class struggle. The coalition government and all the parties in the Bundestag (parliament) are trying at all costs to prevent a mass movement of the working class against sackings and social attacks from joining forces with resistance to armament and war.

Such a movement is clearly maturing. This can already be seen in the immediate neighbouring countries: A new railway workers’ strike is being prepared in France, Spanish care workers and Belgian airport workers are fighting back against wage theft and excessive workloads, and the huge Palestine protests in London herald a Europe-wide anti-war movement. It is only a matter of time before this movement spreads to the autoworkers threatened by sackings and cutbacks, the Galeria shop assistants and the railway workers and train drivers in Germany.

However, this requires an internationalist, socialist leadership. Independent rank-and-file action committees must be set up in the workplaces, and the protests against war and genocide must be linked to workers’ struggles. This requires a conscious struggle against the trade unions, which support the pro-war policies of the ruling class. Above all, it requires the building of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, which is the only party fighting against war and capitalism.



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