

Brutal police operation against anti-genocide protest at Berlin's Free University

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The ruling class in Germany is taking increasingly brutal action against any criticism of Israel's genocide in the Gaza Strip.

On Thursday, around 60 students from Students for a Free Palestine occupied a lecture theatre at Berlin's Free University (FU). Politicians and the media responded with a massive police operation, a smear campaign and calls for draconian punishments.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth movement of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and the Fourth International, condemns the action in the strongest possible terms and calls for the continuation and expansion of the protests.

In the preceding weeks, students at the Free University and universities throughout Germany had already organised rallies and other protests against the genocide in Gaza and the one-sided position of the universities. The student group at the FU presented four demands to the university management in advance. These included "advocating a permanent ceasefire" and "promoting a discourse on Palestine/Israel based on human rights and facts."

According to Students for a Free Palestine, the university management did not respond to these demands and refused to create opportunities for discourse on Palestine/Israel. The group explains in its press statement that the December 14 occupation was a response to this refusal and an attempt to "create a space for fact-based and critical discourse on Palestine/Israel." For the duration of the occupation, which began on Thursday morning, various lectures were delivered in the lecture theatre—including by several Jewish speakers.

Towards the afternoon, the university management called on the police to clear the lecture theatre.

According to a spokesperson for the student group, the Berlin Senate (state executive) itself had asked the university management to do so. The police arrived with a contingent of over 100 officers and—as several videos on social media show—acted with extreme brutality. Students were removed from the hall with police officers using deliberately painful techniques.

Politicians and the media reacted to the occupation with an aggressive smear campaign. The tabloid *Bild* and the *Berliner Zeitung* ran the headline "Jew-haters occupy lecture theatre at Berlin university" and t-online.de accused the students of relativising the Holocaust.

Leading politicians from all government parties sang from the same hymnsheet. Kai Wegner (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), the mayor of Berlin, described the occupation on X (formerly Twitter) as a "disgusting action" and scolded, "Anti-Semites have no place in Berlin."

Federal Minister of Justice Marco Buschmann (Liberal Democratic Party, FDP) told *Welt am Sonntag*: "Universities are places of intellectual freedom." Antisemitism, hatred of Jews, political Islamism or religious fanaticism had no place there. He "assumes that criminal investigations will be carried out and appropriate penalties imposed."

And Alexander Throm (CDU), domestic policy spokesperson for the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag, threatened: "Such actions must have consequences for the perpetrators." He also suggested the consideration of further steps, such as bans or exmatriculation [deregistering of students].

The nominally "left-wing" parties expressed themselves accordingly. Marcel Hopp, a member of the Senate for the Social Democratic Party (SPD), supported the eviction because "Jewish students had

been harassed.” Among other things, he called for students to be banned from university premises: “For FU students, this would mean that they could no longer study here.”

Tobias Schulze, deputy chairman of the Left Party’s parliamentary group, also joined in the smear campaign. Freedom of expression had its “limits where anti-Semitism is expressed and terror or the Holocaust is trivialised or Jewish people are marginalised.”

Politicians and the media are trying to support the accusation of antisemitism against the students by claiming that Jewish students were denied access to the occupied lecture theatre. “We must not allow Jewish students to be denied access to lecture theatres, to be subjected to hostility or even violence,” Science Minister Bettina Stark-Watzinger (FDP) told *Welt am Sonntag*. “Where legally possible,” she said, “exmatriculation should not be ruled out in particularly serious cases.”

The claim that Jewish students were not allowed into the hall is a barefaced lie. In fact, several of the speakers in the lecture theatre were Jewish students who described their experiences as relatives of Holocaust victims.

On the other hand, throughout the occupation there were provocations and physical attacks by Zionists who tore down posters outside the venue showing, among other things, pictures of children killed in Gaza or quotes from Israeli politicians expressing their genocidal intentions.

Aggressive individuals, who obviously intended to disrupt the speeches in the lecture theatre, were temporarily denied access. However, after the university management demanded that they also be allowed in, even the provocateurs were allowed to enter, which escalated the situation inside the room.

The narrative that students were not allowed into the lecture theatre because of their religion or ethnicity was eventually contradicted by the university management itself. In its press release of December 15, it admitted: “Reports that people were not allowed into the lecture theatre because of their faith or nationality are not true.”

In reality, the brutal police operation and the demand for draconian punishments against the students once again make one thing clear: It is not the students protesting against the genocide in Gaza, including

many Jewish students, who are part of the tradition of antisemitism. On the contrary, it is Germany’s ruling class that is returning to its darkest traditions.

Politicians from all parties in the Bundestag support and justify the genocide that the Israeli army is committing against the Palestinian population. And they are suppressing the growing opposition to this with methods that are increasingly reminiscent of those of a fascist dictatorship.

At the same time, this brutality is not an expression of the strength but of the weakness of the ruling class, which feels increasingly under pressure by the massive opposition. This now needs a clear political orientation and perspective. The IYSSE calls on students to turn to the working class and mobilise this most powerful social force on the basis of a socialist programme against capitalism, fascism and war.



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