

Berlin's support for Israel and the genocidal traditions of German imperialism

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Between 1904 and 1908, German imperialism committed the first genocide of the 20th century with the suppression of the Herrero and Nama uprising in what was then the German Empire colony of German South West Africa (now part of Namibia). This was followed between 1941 and 1945 by the murder of 6 million Jews and the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, which cost the lives of up to 30 million Soviet citizens, the largest genocide in history.

In the 21st century, Germany's ruling class is seamlessly continuing these traditions of genocide. It is one of the most aggressive supporters of the genocidal actions of the far-right Netanyahu regime and the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip. On Tuesday, news magazine *Der Spiegel* reported that Germany was preparing to deliver around 10,000 rounds of 120-millimetre precision tank ammunition to Israel. It had previously become known that Berlin had increased its arms exports to Israel tenfold since the beginning of the mass slaughter in the Gaza Strip.

At the same time, the German government is also backing Israel in legal terms. On January 12, government spokesperson Steffen Hebestreit announced that Germany would intervene as a third party before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to speak out against South Africa's lawsuit against Israeli genocide in Gaza, which is supported by at least 60 states.

"We know that different countries have different assessments of Israel's operation in the Gaza Strip. However, the German government firmly and explicitly rejects the accusation of genocide that has now been levelled against Israel at the International Court of Justice," said Hebestreit. "This accusation has no basis whatsoever."

In fact, the lawyers representing the South African government before the ICJ had clearly demonstrated just one day earlier that Israel was guilty of genocide and had thus violated the 1948 Genocide Convention. The WSWs has reported how the lawyers' submissions demonstrated both Israel's destructive and mass murderous actions and the genocidal intentions behind them.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the Israeli

army killed nearly 24,000 Palestinians in the first 100 days of the genocide, including more than 9,600 children. More than 60,000 people were injured. In relation to Germany, this would correspond to 850,000 dead and 2.5 million injured. Almost 2 million people, i.e., almost the entire population of the Gaza Strip, have been forced to flee and are starving as a result of the Israeli blockade. Schools, hospitals and refugee camps are also being systematically bombed and journalists and healthcare workers deliberately killed.

South African lawyer Adila Hassim, who delivered the first keynote address in The Hague on Thursday, said Israel had "subjected the Gaza Strip to one of the heaviest conventional bombardments in the history of modern warfare." The scale of the killing was "so great that the bodies that are found are buried in mass graves where they often cannot be identified." It was "nothing other than the destruction of Palestinian life. It is deliberate. No one is spared, not even new-born babies."

That this is a deliberate and intentional policy of destruction is equally clear. These are just a few selected examples cited in the statement of claim at the ICJ.

- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared on October 28: "You must remember what Amalek did to you." He was referring to a biblical passage in the Old Testament, which states: "Now go and strike Amalek ... Do not spare them, but kill man and woman, children and infants."

- On October 7, Nissim Vaturi, deputy speaker of the Israeli Knesset and member of the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, had already called for "the Gaza Strip to be wiped off the face of the earth."

- On October 9, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant announced that Israel had placed Gaza under "complete siege. No electricity, no food, no water, no fuel." They were fighting "human animals" and acting accordingly.

- And on November 6, Giora Eiland, a former Israeli major general, wrote that Israel "must trigger a humanitarian crisis in Gaza." The Gaza Strip will become "a place where no human being can live."

In The Hague, South African Supreme Court lawyer Tembeka Ngcukaitobi argued that it was precisely these genocidal calls that “are then repeated by soldiers on the ground in Gaza as they engage in the destruction of Palestinians and the physical infrastructure of Gaza.”

It is the height of criminality and provocation for the German ruling class to justify the genocide in Gaza by referring to its own past crimes. “In view of Germany’s history and the human crime of the Shoah, the German government considers itself particularly committed to the Convention against Genocide,” said Hebestreit. It was “a central instrument of international law to implement the ‘Never again!’ [principle]. We are firmly opposed to its political instrumentalisation.”

In fact, it is the German government that is instrumentalising the Holocaust in order to justify genocide and suppress any opposition to it once again. It is not implementing the “Never again!”; its real message is: “Yes, we are doing it again!” This is so obvious that even capitalist governments in former German colonies with close economic and political ties to Berlin feel compelled to castigate German support for Israel and the genocidal traditions of German imperialism.

“Namibia rejects Germany’s Support of the Genocidal Intent of the Racist Israeli State against Innocent Civilians in Gaza,” reads a statement published by the Namibian presidency on X/Twitter on January 13. The statement recalls that “On Namibian soil, Germany committed the first genocide of the 20th century in 1904–1908, in which tens of thousands of innocent Namibians died in the most inhumane and brutal conditions.” It declares:

In light of Germany’s inability to draw lessons from its horrific history, President Hage Geingob expresses deep concern with the shocking decision communicated by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany yesterday, 12 January 2024, in which it rejected the morally upright indictment brought forward by South Africa before the International Court of Justice that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

In that vein, President Geingob appeals to the German Government to reconsider its untimely decision to intervene as a third-party in defence and support of the genocidal acts of Israel before the International Court of Justice.

Geingob’s appeal to the German elites to “reconsider” their stance is as doomed to failure as appeals to the German

Kaiser or Hitler to refrain from their genocidal policies. Ultimately, German support for the genocide of the Palestinians is rooted in the predatory interests of German imperialism just as much as in the policy of extermination under the Kaiser and the Nazis.

At the end of the 19th century, German imperialism under Kaiser Wilhelm II claimed a “place in the sun” and had in mind the acquisition and brutal exploitation of colonies in Africa. During the Second World War, the Holocaust was a direct component of the Nazis’ war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, which aimed to defeat Bolshevism, create *Lebensraum* (living space) in the East, plunder raw materials and subjugate the whole of Europe.

Today, German imperialism is once again preparing to establish itself as the leading European and world power. Israel serves Berlin and the other imperialist powers as a bridgehead to assert their imperialist interests in the resource-rich and geostrategically important Middle East and beyond. The destruction of the Palestinians is ultimately part of the goal of eliminating the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen and Iran as opponents, escalating the war offensive against Russia and China and, as in 1914 and 1939, igniting another global war for the imperialist redivision of the world.

The only way to stop this madness is to build an international mass movement against genocide and war and its root cause, capitalism. As the great revolutionary Marxist Rosa Luxemburg emphasised on the eve of the First World War, the working class must understand “the inseparable connection between imperialism and capitalist development” and “draw the conclusion that the only way to fight imperialism, war, the theft of countries, genocide, violation of the law and violent politics is by fighting capitalism, by opposing global political genocide with social revolution.”

It is precisely this understanding and this perspective that the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is fighting for in the European elections together with its comrades in Europe and internationally. Share our election statement as widely as possible, if you are eligible to vote, sign up to enable the SGP to contest the elections, and build the Fourth International as a new mass socialist party to eliminate capitalist evils once and for all.



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