

Oppose the firing of Ghassan Hage!

Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei
12 February 2024

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party) protests in the strongest possible terms against the dismissal of Ghassan Hage by the Max Planck Society and calls for his immediate reinstatement. We appeal to academics, students and all those who do not want to give up democratic rights to the attacks of the right-wing without a fight to join this protest.

The Lebanese-Australian scientist, who has taught in Melbourne, Beirut, Nanterre (Paris), Copenhagen and Harvard, has been a guest lecturer at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (Saale) since April 2023. The Max Planck Society has now dismissed him without notice for condemning the Israeli mass murder of Palestinians on social media.

The significance of the attack on Ghassan Hage goes far beyond his individual case. A precedent is being set for the co-opting of research and teaching by the state. With 84 research institutions, 24,000 employees and an annual budget of €2.5 billion, the Max Planck Society has enormous influence on the research content that is funded in Germany and on who receives a professorial or doctoral position.

At a time when Germany is massively rearming and the government is announcing that Germans must become “war-ready” again, the Max Planck Society is signaling with the sacking of Hage that it no longer tolerates scholarly material and opinions that are contrary to the political goals of the government and the ruling elites.

Hage’s dismissal was prompted by a sensationalist and inflammatory article that appeared in the daily newspaper *Welt* on 5 February. Under the headline “Anti-Semitism scandal shocks German Nobel Prize training centre,” the right-wing Springer magazine accused the scientist of preaching “hatred of Israel” and unmistakably glorifying the “terror of Hamas.” Three days later, Hage learned of his dismissal by the

leadership of the Max Planck Society in Munich. “No one in Munich, lawyer or otherwise, contacted me or sought my opinion,” he reported on his blog.

In a brief two-paragraph statement, the Max Planck Society stated that it had separated itself from the “Lebanese-Australian scientist known and respected in the professional community” because “among the views he has recently spread via social media, many were incompatible with the basic values of the Max Planck Society.” It continued, “Racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, discrimination, hatred and incitement have no place in the Max Planck Society.”

Hage categorically rejects these defamatory accusations. “I stand by everything I say in my social media,” he wrote. “I have a political ideal that I have always struggled for regarding Israel/Palestine. It is the ideal of a multi-religious society made up of Christians, Muslims and Jews living together on that land. My academic writings on that matter, and they are considerable, attest to the way I have always struggled for this ideal.”

He has criticized both Israelis and Palestinians who oppose this goal. “If some right-wing journalists who dislike my politics decide to pick from all what I have written my critiques of Israel and accuse me of antisemitism, I expect my employer to know or at least to investigate my record and defend me against such accusations. Believing in a multi-religious society and critiquing those who work against it is not anti-Semitism. I will not accept to be put in a defensive position where I have to justify myself for holding and working for such ideals,” he wrote.

The Max Planck Society’s claim that Ghassan Hage spreads racism and antisemitism is a vile slander. He was fired for publicly criticizing the mass murder of Palestinians in Gaza. The quotes cited by *Die Welt* as evidence of his “hatred of the Jews” clearly castigates the violence of the Israeli government and take sides

with the Palestinian population. There is no trace of antisemitism in them—unless one describes protest against the murder and expulsion of two million Palestinians by the far-right Israeli government as antisemitism.

The German government is deeply involved in the crimes of the Netanyahu regime, supplying it with weapons, defending it against international criticism and participating militarily in the conflict in the Middle East. In Germany, it bans demonstrations, prohibits slogans and arrests activists who defend the Palestinians. Meanwhile, the media largely ignores the bloody events in Gaza.

The reason for this is not, as the official propaganda repeatedly claims, the “German responsibility for the Holocaust.” To support the slaughter of tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians in the name of “responsibility for the Holocaust” is the worst cynicism. The real reason is the effort of Germany and its NATO partners to completely subjugate the Middle East to their rule again.

The Middle East is only one front on which Germany is taking the offensive militarily. The government is financing the war against Russia in Ukraine with tens of billions of euros, categorically excluding any negotiated solution and stationing troops on the Russian border.

The highest-ranking German general, Inspector General Carsten Breuer, told *Welt am Sonntag* that the Bundeswehr (German army) had to be “ready for war” within five years in order to be able to wage war against Russia. War readiness means “much more” than defensive capabilities, he added. “In addition to the personnel and material commitment, it is also about the necessary change of mentality that we have to undergo,” he said. A “change of mentality is needed, both in society and, above all, in the Bundeswehr.”

This explains why the government no longer tolerates public statements that are directed against its war policy. In the Weimar Republic, opponents of war, such as Carl von Ossietzky, ended up in prison long before Hitler took power and brutally suppressed all resistance.

The fact that the leading German scientific institution, the Max Planck Society, is now also supporting this campaign must not be tolerated. It is still well remembered what a disgraceful role German scholars

played after the Nazis came to power. Hitler did not have to co-opt the universities, they did it themselves. The lawyer Carl Schmitt and the philosopher Martin Heidegger were the best-known heads of a large group of professors who praised the Führer, adapted their teaching to the racial ideology of the Nazis and aryanised the chairs of their Jewish colleagues.

The fact that Ghassan Hage’s expulsion is not about the fight against antisemitism is also shown by the striking contrast to the behaviour of the right-wing extremist historian Jörg Baberowski by the academic world. When he announced in 2014 in *Der Spiegel* that Hitler was not vicious and stood in solidarity with the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte, the same professors and media who are now inciting against Ghassan Hage did not turn against Baberowski—but against the students who criticized him.

Even when courts confirmed that Baberowski could be called a right-wing extremist and falsifier of history, who publicly incited against refugees, and insulted and physically attacked students of his department, university management stood behind him. He still heads his department at Berlin’s Humboldt University.

Resist the initial signs of state co-option! Defend Ghassan Hage! Stop universities and scientific institutions becoming centers of war propaganda!

Send protest letters against Hage’s dismissal to the Max Planck Society in Munich (post@gv.mpg.de) and to the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (info@eth.mpg.de)! (Send a copy of your message to sgp@gleichheit.de so we can publish it anonymously.)



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