

Berliner Sparkasse freezes bank account of “Jewish Voice” due to anti-war event

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In the midst of growing global opposition to Israel’s genocide in the Gaza Strip, the bank accounts of Jewish anti-war organisations are once again being blocked in Germany. After the Berlin state government recently created the conditions for preventing students from graduating on a political basis, there are now also calls in the media to ban anti-war events.

Last week, Berliner Sparkasse blocked the bank account of “Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East,” known for its opposition to the genocide in Gaza and Israel’s apartheid and occupation policy. It did this “as a precautionary measure” and with immediate effect, without prior consultation or justification. In a letter to the group’s board of directors, Berliner Sparkasse demanded that a list with the names and addresses of all members be submitted within a few days.

This is an anti-democratic and criminal attack by a bank on a political organisation that is unprecedented in recent decades. The fact that a German bank is freezing a left-wing Jewish organisation’s financial resources to the tune of five figures is reminiscent of the confiscation of Jewish property during the Nazi dictatorship and is obviously politically motivated.

In a statement, Jewish Voice reported that the Bank für Sozialwirtschaft had already closed the organisation’s account in 2019 on a political basis. The organisation said, “This pressure and political persecution will only increase the more Israel and its apartheid policy in the state of Israel and the West Bank, and now its genocidal policy in the Gaza Strip, lose approval in the world. Germany is one of Israel’s last loyal allies, and German policy is cooperating with Israel’s apartheid and genocide, even though over 80 percent of the German population does not support the German government’s policy.”

The reason for the attack is that a “Palestine Congress” is planned for the middle of the month in Berlin, which is to be directed against Israel’s massacre in the Gaza Strip. The event will include various lectures by human rights activists, artists, trade union officials and bourgeois and pseudo-left politicians such as the former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis. “The closer the congress gets, the more persecution takes place,” reports the organisation. “We, the Jewish Voice, have made our account available for this—which is why it has now been blocked.”

The association has announced that it will take legal action against the blocking of its account and compared the demand for a list of members to the repressive measures “of the Berlin state Criminal Investigations Department (LKA) or the police, who have been politically persecuting us as a Jewish organisation for some time.”

In fact, there can be little doubt that the actions by the Sparkasse enjoy the political support of the government authorities and were most likely even instigated by the Berlin Senate (state executive) itself, a coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU) and Social Democrats (SPD). In mid-March, Interior State Secretary Christian Hochgrebe (SPD) announced he would look into banning the “Palestine Congress” and have its preparations analysed by the intelligence services. CDU state parliamentary group leader Dirk Stettner declared: “We must do everything possible to ensure that such a Jew-hating event does not take place.”

The measures envisaged are extremely far-reaching. While Stettner appealed to Berlin conference facilities providers “not to rent rooms to the organisers” and called on the federal government to “refuse entry” into Germany for speakers, in the tabloid *Bild*, Interior Senator Iris Spranger (SPD) threatened to “issue a ban

on political activity in relation to the event” against participants.

The demands for a ban and censorship were immediately eagerly taken up by the bourgeois media and justified with further unrestrained lies. A glance at the headlines shows just how blurred the line is between the supposed “quality press,” right-wing gutter media and pseudo-left gazettes: from “Jew-haters plan summit in Berlin” (*Bild*) to “Congress of Israel-haters” (*Jungle World*) to “Antisemites of the world want to gather in Berlin—authorities review ban on Israel-haters’ congress” (*Tagesspiegel*).

Criticism of Israel’s bourgeois state apparatus is routinely cast as ethnic hatred. This process is based on a form of nationalist mythology that bears more resemblance to the “blood and soil” ideology of the extreme right than to a serious argument.

In the conservative weekly *Jüdische Allgemeine*, Sigmund Königsberg, antisemitism commissioner of the Jewish Community of Berlin, also demanded that the congress be “banned” and its speakers “prohibited from entering Germany and Berlin, and be banned from engaging in activities.” The congress aimed to call for the “annihilation of Israel” and to demand “that the people living there should either be murdered or expelled,” he claimed. According to Königsberg, “neo-Nazis, anti-imperialists, Muslim Brothers, Tehran mullahs and Marxist PFLP terrorists” could “hardly be distinguished from one another” in terms of content. Each of these claims is a brazen, hysterical lie that has no basis in fact.

In the same newspaper, Volker Beck, a former member of the Bundestag (parliament) for the Greens and current president of the German-Israeli Society, demanded that not only the “Palestine Congress,” but also all calls in favour of the abolition of nation states should be banned. According to Beck, it was “not possible to legislate for Israel alone.” In order to provide the judiciary with appropriate means, “the Federal Budget Code, the Criminal Code and foreign trade law must finally be tackled.”

The media agitation and the police-state campaign against the Palestine Congress and Jewish Voice confirm what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) has warned against. When the Berlin Senate set about liquidating the Oyoun cultural centre in November last year, the SGP

condemned the “far-reaching attack on freedom of art and expression” and declared in a mass-circulated leaflet:

From now on, any organisation that criticises the government’s policy must fear losing any basis for work ... Anyone who criticises the government’s pro-war policy must expect arbitrary arrests, house searches and secret service surveillance. Demonstrations against the massacre in Gaza are banned by the dozens, the demand for equal rights for Palestinians is criminalised, and Muslims are placed under general suspicion.

Since then, the Berlin Senate has agreed to introduce a censorship clause covering the cultural and arts sector and is working on imposing stricter regulations upon universities, which will enable university administrations to de-register students on a political basis. Now, it must be added, the ruling class is also threatening to expropriate Jewish organisations if they criticise the pro-war policy of the German government and its Israeli ally.

We call on all workers, young people and defenders of democratic rights to reject the attacks on opponents of war and left-wing Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian organisations in the strongest possible terms and to protest against them. The far-sightedness of the SGP’s warnings shows that a socialist perspective is necessary that combines the struggle to defend democratic rights with the fight against war and its root cause, the capitalist system.



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