

Germany: Police terror, intimidation and censorship against opposition to the genocide in Gaza

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On April 12, hundreds of police stormed a Palestine congress being held in Berlin to protest the Israeli genocide in Gaza. In scenes resembling the activities of Nazi stormtroopers in the 1930s, police switched off the electricity of the congress, arrested some of the organizers and closed down the assembly just two hours after it began.

One of the main speakers at the conference was the British-Palestinian surgeon and rector of the University of Glasgow, Dr. Ghassan Abu-Sittah. Abu-Sittah was due to report on “the 43 days that I had seen in the hospitals in Gaza, working in both Shifa and al-Ahli hospital.” The surgeon was detained immediately at the airport upon his arrival in Germany and questioned for around three and a half hours by police.

His passport was confiscated and, in his own words, he was informed he would “not be allowed to enter German soil, and that this ban will last the whole of April.” In addition, he was warned that if he sought to address the congress in Berlin by internet link or video he would be breaking German law and could be fined or sentenced to up to a year of prison. He only received his passport again on the steps of the plane, which flew him back out of Germany. A respected and eminent surgeon due to report on the disastrous situation prevailing in the ruins of Gaza’s hospitals devastated by Israeli bombardments was treated like a common criminal!

But this was only the most extreme expression of the draconian response of the German state to every opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

For months now, demonstrations in Germany by groups and organisations protesting the genocide in Gaza have been routinely met with massive shows of force by armed police. Before any demonstration can begin, the police force the organisers of the protest to read out a long list of

demands banning anti-Israeli slogans, banners and placards. In addition, political leaflets circulated at the protests are carefully controlled and are subject to be confiscated by the police.

The violent measures employed by the police were also evident at a pro-Palestinian protest held March 29 at Berlin’s main train station.

Sefa is a young student in Berlin who is active in the protests and attended the protest at the train station. He spoke to the WSWs about what happened:

“I was at the protest and was among the demonstrators police sought to physically remove from the station with extreme violence. They grabbed me and I was strangled in the process. Many were taken away, including women and young people. I already have one criminal charge for protesting. When I carry a placard they (the police) try to grab it and take it away.

“I took part in an earlier protest at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK) where students read out the names and ages of the children and babies killed in Gaza. Our protest was immediately jumped upon by the media and politicians who denounced us as antisemites. It is now very hard to protest in Germany without being arrested or demonised by the media.”

In addition to the police violence, the German media is also cracking down on dissident voices.

On April 8, reporter Helen Fares was summarily sacked by the German broadcaster Südwestrundfunk (SWR). The 29-year-old reporter of Syrian origin was the presenter on the talk show “MixTalk” on the local television station. Her sacking, however, had nothing to do with her work for the broadcaster. Instead, Fares was fired for posts calling for a boycott of products from companies that support Israel’s economy, in line with the policy of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. In

other posts on her private Instagram channel with 100,000 followers, Fares described Israel as an “apartheid state” that commits “genocide.”

As is the norm now in Germany, Fares was immediately the victim of a coordinated campaign of abuse and denounced as an antisemite. Refusing to be intimidated by the arbitrary action of her employer, Fares released a new video: “German media is being silenced—but we will not be silenced,” in which she fiercely denied claims that her call for a boycott amounted to antisemitism.

“I want to make one thing really clear,” she declared. “We are not antisemitic because we are boycotting products from a company that supports a country that is currently being investigated for genocide in front of the ICJ because it slaughtered tens and thousands of people.”

Fares then went on to describe the way in which SWR capitulated to demands by far-right and Zionist forces which had demanded her sacking and even called for her deportation. Her intention, Fares noted, was to express her solidarity with millions of people around the world, “including thousands upon thousands of Jewish people, and those people have asked us specifically to do whatever we can to create pressure on the Israeli government to halt its actions in Palestine because their actions are fueling antisemitism due to people conflating the Israeli government with being representatives of all Jewish people.”

In the same week that Fares was sacked, the University of Cologne announced that it was withdrawing its invitation to the Jewish US philosopher Nancy Fraser to take up a professorship because she had criticized Israel.

The reason given for the disinvite was Fraser’s support for the open letter “Philosophy for Palestine” from last November. In the Open Letter, leading philosopher professors from North America, Latin America and Europe had expressed their public and unequivocal “solidarity with the Palestinian people” and denounced “the ongoing and rapidly escalating massacre being committed in Gaza by Israel and with the full financial, material, and ideological support of our own governments.”

The decision to refuse a professorship to Fraser was immediately met with a broadside of criticism from leading academics, who have called for Fraser’s disinvite by the University of Cologne to be withdrawn. Describing its decision as an attack on the freedom of thought, the list of academics opposing the disinvite include the leading historian and antisemitism researcher Wolfgang Benz and 22 other prominent academics, including sociologists

Stephan Lessenich and Hartmut Rosa and philosopher Axel Honneth.

In a further draconian measure aimed at cementing support for the Israeli genocide and establishing a basis for deporting its opponents, German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (Social Democrats, SPD) has made proposals for new criteria to determine who should be able to acquire German citizenship.

According to reports in *Der Spiegel* magazine, Faeser proposes that, in addition to the usual questions relating to German law, history and the constitution, applicants for citizenship must be able to answer specific questions relating to Germany’s relationship with Israel.

Faeser’s proposals are in line with the law passed in December 2023 by the interior minister of Saxony-Anhalt, Tamara Zieschang (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), which makes such criteria conditional for migrants seeking to become German citizens in the state. Justifying the new citizenship requirements, Zieschang declared at the end of last year: “The fact that the special German responsibility for the state of Israel is expressly recognised and that Israel’s right to exist is also recognised will now have to be confirmed in writing by those who wish to be naturalised.”

This extraordinarily discriminatory measure is clearly aimed against Muslim communities in Germany and those from Muslim countries seeking to migrate to Germany. It plays completely into the hands of the far-right Alternative for Germany, which has long agitated against Muslim migrants and is plotting in secret meetings the expulsion of millions.

Fearful of the growth of popular opposition to the massacre taking place in Gaza and the danger of a new world war, the German coalition government is trampling on basic democratic rights and giving its police free rein to physically abuse protesters while adopting measures traditionally associated with far right, dictatorial regimes.



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