

Ban on the Palestine Congress: Another step towards a German police state

Tamino Dreisam, Peter Schwarz
16 April 2024

Since hundreds of police officers broke up a Palestine Congress in Berlin last Friday, new details have come to light every day about the arbitrariness and ruthlessness with which the police disregarded the law and trampled on democratic rights.

The German government employs the same police brutality against opponents of the genocide it supports in Gaza that it usually accuses its enemies, such as Russian President Putin, of using. Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (Social Democrats, SPD) backed the brutal police action on Friday. She wrote on Twitter that it was “right and necessary” for the Berlin police to “crack down on the so-called Palestine Congress.”

A collective of lawyers advising the organisers of the congress published a statement April 13 detailing the preparations for the congress and the course of events. It reveals that there had already been several security talks between the organisers and the police in the run-up to the congress. On the morning of the congress, the programme and the planned speakers were discussed with the police and confirmed by them.

However, although the organisers agreed to all of the police’s conditions, even if they were more than questionable, the police banned the four-day meeting after two hours and broke it up.

A video message, announced in the programme, by 86-year-old Dr. Salman Abu Sitta, who has been campaigning for the Palestinian cause for decades, served as a pretext. Although Abu Sitta did not say anything illegal, even according to the representative of the public prosecutor’s office present, the police stopped the video after a few minutes.

The reason given was that the speaker had been banned from undertaking any activity in Berlin. However, neither the organisers nor the public—and apparently not even the police until shortly

beforehand—had been aware of this. Furthermore, it had already been clarified by the courts in previous cases that a ban on activities does not apply to the playing of videos.

Even when the organisers offered to refrain from playing the video, the police were not satisfied. They now claimed that the livestream of the event could potentially be used to broadcast criminal statements around the world. The organisers even agreed to do without the livestream. But that did not help them either.

The decision to close down the event had obviously been made long ago, even though there was no legal basis for it and not even a plausible excuse. The overall head of police operations justified the ban with the Kafkaesque argumentation that showing the video message of a person against whom a ban on undertaking any activity had been issued gave him sufficient reason to suspect that criminal statements would be made if the congress continued.

This is ideological justice based on a person’s views, just as it was under the Nazis. It is not a criminal offence or a punishable statement that is being punished here; the mere suspicion that those affected might say things that do not agree with the government’s line is sufficient.

Numerous other repressive measures were taken against the congress. For example, bans were imposed on other announced speakers. In at least two cases, contact bans were imposed, prohibiting all contact with and harbouring of congress participants.

The Ministry of the Interior has imposed a ban on the former Greek finance minister and chairman of the pan-European party DiEM25, Yanis Varoufakis, which also includes a ban on entry to Germany and online access. This means practically that Varoufakis is no longer

allowed to speak publicly in Germany.

Dr. Ghassan Abu Sittah, a medical doctor and rector of Glasgow University, was also banned from entering the country on short notice by the Federal Police. He was detained on arrival at Berlin airport, interrogated for three hours and then put on a plane back to London. He was also banned from delivering his speech online.

Ghassan Abu Sittah had worked with Doctors Without Borders in Gaza hospitals for several weeks during the war and testified about this at the International Court of Justice, where Germany stands accused of aiding and abetting genocide. He wanted to report on his harrowing experiences in Gaza at the congress.

In the run-up to the congress, the authorities had already used various methods of intimidation in an attempt to prevent him from attending.

For example, the bank account of the Jewish Voice for a Just Peace association, which was collecting donations for the congress, was blocked. There were “security warnings” against the Cafe MadaMe, where a fundraising evening for the Palestine Congress was to take place. This was eventually cancelled under pressure.

And the landlord of the event hall was also put under pressure by various authorities to find alleged deficiencies in fire safety and usage conditions. It is hard to say whether such methods are more likely to come from the repertoire of the mafia or that of an authoritarian dictatorship.

When all intimidation measures failed to bear fruit, the congress was banned without any legal basis. The lawyers’ collective concludes its explanation of the developments with the following statement:

Any constitutional attempts to protect the meeting and those taking part in it and to ensure that it ran smoothly and lawfully were torpedoed by the police. The impression was created that legal protection was to be curtailed here, beyond all tried and tested assembly law experience, case law and constitutional provisions.

took action against further pro-Palestinian protests in the days that followed.

On Saturday, around 1,900 people gathered for a demonstration to protest against the ban on the congress. The demonstration was accompanied by a large contingent of armed police. In intense heat, the police stopped the demonstration for just under half an hour before storming in without warning and pulling out a group of participants. A total of six people were arrested during the demonstration.

The following day, the police took even more brutal action against the “Occupy against Occupation” protest camp in front of the Reichstag (federal parliament building). The protest camp had been registered on Monday of the previous week to protest for several days against Germany’s active role in the ongoing genocide.

On Sunday, the police brutally attacked the peaceful protest. Several people—including Jews—were beaten, choked and pepper sprayed, thrown to the ground and injured. Several had to be taken to hospital. Four people were arrested, including a member of the Jewish Voice.

There were other incidents during the congress in which democratic rights were trampled on. For example, the *taz* told how a congress participant was reported to the police because he was wearing a T-shirt with the words “Free Palestine” and a stylised fist in the Palestinian colours. He had to take off the T-shirt and hand it over to the police as evidence. Several participants and journalists reported that they were followed, observed, had their IDs checked and were searched by the police on their way home.

These are methods familiar from those of dictatorial regimes. They are directed against anyone who opposes Germany’s pro-war policy. This also shows the enormous fear the ruling class has of opposition to its war policy. The working class must be mobilised to stop the genocide, the war policy and the attacks on democratic rights.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

Visibly emboldened by the ban, the Berlin police