

Hundreds of students demonstrate in Berlin against destruction of their democratic rights

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Under the slogan “Hands off Students’ Rights,” around 500 students and supporters demonstrated in Berlin Thursday against the reintroduction of regulatory laws at Berlin’s universities as part of the Higher Education Act. The draft law presented by the Berlin Senate (state executive), which had its first reading on Thursday, is intended to enable university administrations to exmatriculate (de-register) students for “criminal offences” such as unauthorised lecture hall occupations, expressing prohibited slogans and other forms of protest.

At the gathering on Bebelplatz in front of the entrance to Humboldt University (HU), several speakers emphasised that the measure was directed against students protesting against the genocide in Gaza supported by the German government, while at the same time creating the conditions for criminalising any left-wing student protest. HU President Julia von Blumenthal had previously publicly supported the amendment to the Higher Education Act.

The Senate’s pretence that the change in the law was aimed at combating “discrimination and violence” and served to “protect victims” was indignantly rejected with reference to the unchallenged actions of right-wing groups and professors. “Exmatriculation can result in the loss of BAföG [student grants] and accommodation in student halls of residence. For students whose residence status depends on their student status, forced de-registration can mean the loss of their livelihood and even deportation,” the official student body of Humboldt University explained in a statement.

Members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) discussed the background and implications of this attack on democratic rights with participants at the demonstration and advocated a

socialist perspective to mobilise the working class against war and imperialism. The weekend before last, the police stormed a congress in Berlin against the genocide in Gaza, arrested participants and attacked peaceful demonstrators in front of the Bundestag (federal parliament). At the same time, Israel and the NATO powers are preparing to wage an open war against Iran and redivide the entire region in a conflagration.

Dara comes from Ireland and works in Berlin. He said, “I’m here to protest against the genocide. Germany is one of Israel’s biggest supporters and supplies billions of euros worth of weapons to the government. We have to change that. The law is not right, people should be able to study even if they criticise this policy. I hope there will be more and more of us.”

“The German government’s position is unacceptable,” Uday said, who is studying at the Technical University. “I’m Palestinian myself and I’m speechless. I’m afraid that the law will restrict our political work. For the West, Israel is a major military centre in the entire region. There are economic, political and strategic interests behind it.”

A student who wished to remain anonymous said, “It’s really scary. As an international student, I feel threatened by the new law. It’s written so vaguely that it could affect anyone. If it goes through, I may lose my residency status and have to leave the country.”

At a subsequent rally in front of the Berlin House of Representatives (state assembly), IYSSE members spoke with participants of the disbanded Palestine Congress and members of the Student Coalition Berlin (SCB) about their experiences. They explained the socialist perspective of the IYSSE, which advocates an orientation towards the interests and struggles of the

international working class among young people and students. SCB spokesperson Julie said:

“The law is not about ‘protecting victims,’ but about enabling punitive measures against students in summary proceedings. This is intended to create another means for university administrators and professors to take action against political activism by students. There is an alignment of the various parties, which are all moving in this direction and creating a whole system of new measures.”

“We as a student body are to be silenced,” says Diaga, who studies and works at Humboldt University. “It’s clearly motivated by silencing the protest against the genocide in Gaza, but it will affect anyone who opposes right-wing politics. Every means of state repression will be used. But it gives me hope that universities are becoming a political space again. I think the state is afraid of a class movement developing.”

Udi Raz, an executive member of the association Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East, recalled that the Berlin Sparkasse had frozen the association’s bank account a few days earlier and demanded a comprehensive list of members from the organisation. Udi referred to the brutal police repression and recalled the countless arrests of Jewish people by the police:

“This development is alarming for Jews in Germany. Whenever we have spoken in the last six years that democracy must apply to all people living between the Jordan and the Mediterranean, whenever we have declared that human rights and international law must also apply to Palestinian people, those in power have pointed the finger at us and slandered us as antisemites and extremists. We experience dangerous attempts to silence us. As a minority, we are forbidden to stand up for human rights. This is McCarthyism par excellence.

“I am proud to be part of a movement that will lead a revolution—not only here in Germany but all over the world. We will get exactly what we deserve, and we deserve nothing less than democratic freedoms, human rights and the full application of international law.”

Yasmin, who also witnessed the dissolution of the Palestine Congress, reported, “The police arrested and imprisoned me several times because I spoke out in favour of human rights and against the genocide in Gaza, which Germany is co-financing. My flat was searched, and my personal belongings were

confiscated. What we have been experiencing for seven months and in the years before is criminalisation by the German government. They send their police to the front line. They use such tactics to intimidate us and silence us.”

Asked about the fact that Western governments have described the Iranian military strike as an “unprecedented attack” and are now escalating war policy in the entire region, Yasmin said, “I don’t believe that anything about this event was ‘unprovoked.’ Israel has attacked several countries in recent months. They attacked the capital of Lebanon, and the media barely covered it. If an Arab country had attacked a European capital, we could imagine what would happen. It is absolutely possible that the West will create a major war. They just seem to have been waiting for it. There are economic motives behind every war.”

She added, “I believe a revolution is necessary. Because we are demanding our right to freedom of speech and assembly, but it is being taken away from us. For months we have been subjected to police brutality and the media has turned against us. Search warrants, beatings, arrests. When these rights are taken away from people by a country that claims to be democratic, that even invades countries in the name of democracy but is unable to grant democracy to its own people—then a revolution must take place, absolutely. We will not allow ourselves to be silenced. All this repression will only fuel our fire.”

Gregor Link and Tamino Dreisam are running for the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) in the European Parliament elections and are also fighting against war propaganda and in favour of a socialist perspective in the Humboldt University student parliament (StuPa).



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