

Leipzig University management uses police and right-wing groups to suppress pro-Palestinian protests

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On May 7, around 50 to 60 students and supporters set up a protest camp on the campus of Leipzig University in eastern Germany. They occupied the university's main auditorium, the Audimax, formed sit-in blockades and set up tents and stands in the university's courtyard.

The "Palestine Campus" group explained that the impulse for the protest was the start of the Israeli army's murderous ground offensive against Rafah. The order to attack was given shortly after Israel rejected a ceasefire agreement. It heralds the presumably bloody climax of the genocidal war against the Palestinians in Gaza.

Students demanded that the university management disclose and stop all its investments and relations with Israel. They are also demanding that the genocide in Palestine be condemned in writing and that the "misleading" definition of antisemitism used by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) be replaced by the "Jerusalem Declaration on Anti-Semitism" (JDA).

The IHRA definition has long been used to defame and suppress any criticism of Zionism and Israel as "antisemitic," just as the German Bundestag did with its anti-BDS resolution, or the Berlin Senate with its recent ban on a pro-Palestine congress.

At the same time, the students in Leipzig were demonstrating their solidarity with the student protests against the genocide in the US, Berlin and worldwide. The press spokesperson for "Palestine Campus," Marius Schneider, criticised the fact that pro-Palestinian events were being banned, while Zionist meetings aimed at legitimising the genocide in Gaza were allowed to take place.

As in Berlin, the university management reacted by immediately mobilising a police force to dismantle the occupation. According to the university's spokesperson, Carsten Heckmann, it requested the police operation at around 3:30 p.m. on the same day.

University Rector Eva Inés Obergfell explained: "We will not tolerate the violent disruption of teaching and the seizure of university premises. There was imminent danger to the safety of students and teaching staff. The decision to dismantle was

unavoidable."

These are outright lies. The occupation of the lecture hall and the peaceful sit-in blockades never jeopardised anyone's safety. The only threat to public safety came from the violent police action against the protests.

A total of 150 officers from the Leipzig police, the Saxony state riot police and the federal police took part in the violent mobilisation against the protesters. In the early evening, the police reported the evacuation of the Audimax and the initiation of criminal proceedings for trespass. Fearful of further protests, the university administration has now obstructed teaching by suspending lectures in the Audimax for the rest of the week.

The university received support from Saxony's Science Minister Sebastian Gemkow (Christian Democratic Union-CDU) and the deputy state chairman of the Saxony Free Democratic Party, Thomas Kunz, who called for the ex-matriculation of those involved.

Juliane Nagel, the Leipzig candidate of the Left Party for the state parliamentary elections, Nils Neubert from the Juso (Young Socialists, affiliated to the SPD) university group and the spokesperson of the Conference of Saxon Student Bodies (KSS) Paul Steinbrecher also supported the action against the students. The KSS statement explicitly stated: "Conditions like those prevailing at Berlin universities must be prevented."

At the forefront of the smear campaign against the protesting students are so-called "anti-German" groups, which are strongly represented in Leipzig and organised a counter-protest with Israel flags under the protection of the Saxony police, blocking the entrance to the lecture hall building.

These groups have spread slanderous claims alleging "antisemitism," "violence" by protesters and "antisemitic access controls" on campus. In this respect the groups resemble far-right groups in the US who spread similar lying propaganda to legitimise attacks on protests against the brutal actions of the Israeli army.

The "anti-German" groups have long been notorious for attacking left-wing meetings and organisations, especially in Leipzig. In 2012, for example, they tried to break up a meeting of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality

(IYSSE) in defence of Günter Grass. They besieged the door to the meeting, attacked organisers, banged on the door and walls and threatened violence, demanding, “Hasn’t someone brought an ice pick?”

At that time the far-right thugs could already count on the backing of the university and the student union (Stura). Amongst those active among the “anti-Germans” in 2012 were Marcel Wodniock and Jakob Heuschmidt, who now works as a lecturer at the university. Now Paul Steinbrecher and Felix Fink, acting in the guise of students, are implementing censorship. Steinbrecher is active for the pseudo-left list “Solidarity. Critical. Active.” In addition to his work as a spokesman for a caretaker company, he is also a university policy officer, while Fink works as a full-time secretary for the German Trade Union Federation (DGB).

The Stura members, who are closely networked with the trade union bureaucracy and the established political parties, had already submitted a motion entitled “No cooperation with supporters of terrorism” to the Stura at the end of October 2023. The Leipzig branch of the youth organisation of the German-Israeli Association (DIG) also supported the motion. The chairman of the DIG, Volker Beck (Greens), is one of the most aggressive agitators against pro-Palestinian protests and calls for harsher state repression on an almost daily basis.

The motion demanded that no fewer than 13 organisations on campus be censored and, in particular, that no financial support for printed material be allowed or that the organisations’ use of university premises be banned. Among the organisations mentioned in the motion were Handala Leipzig, Jewish Israeli Dissent, Young Struggle, the SDS (student association of the Left Party) and the women’s group “Zora,” which had already been attacked by the state last December.

The SDS and other organisations responded to this attack with their own motion “Statement on the war in Israel and Palestine,” which was finally adopted. It condemned violence on the part of both sides without taking a clear stance against the Israeli genocide. Instead of confronting the Jusos and other organisations and clearly condemning their right-wing, pro-Israeli policies, the motion built bridges to them.

In the StuPa of Humboldt University Berlin, a similar discussion took a completely different course, thanks to the intervention by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) university group. Several IYSSE speakers in Berlin sharply attacked the Jusos and exposed their role as a pro-war organisation. One speaker made it clear that it was not the opponents of the massacre in Gaza who stood in the tradition of antisemitism but rather the supporters of the Juso motion. The same applies to the right-wing attack on students in Leipzig.

As far as the Left Party and its youth organisation are concerned, they do not represent an opposition to the governing parties but rather play the role of their henchmen. In the Bundestag, the Left Party has united with all other parties, including the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), in

supporting solidarity with Israel. At the state level, the Left Party is fueling the illusion that it is possible to fight fascism in alliance with the governing coalition and the CDU.

The political record of the Left Party is also clear in Leipzig and on campus. When the Stura at Leipzig University attacked and censored the IYSSE in 2019 with similarly outrageous accusations of “antisemitism,” the student organisation of the Left Party, the third-largest party in the state parliament, stayed deafeningly silent. While the IYSSE was denied rooms for meetings at the university, meetings were held on campus with the far-right Pegida apologist Werner Patzelt and AfD supporter Thomas Maul, who writes for both the anti-German magazine *Bahamas* and the far-right “Axis of Good.”

This silence has continued up until the present. Two years ago, on April 1, 2022, the Stura passed a motion with the Orwellian title “Freedom of opinion and free speech.” The motion explicitly censored organisations that allegedly did not follow this principle “for ideological reasons (such as an anti-imperialist world view).”

The motion states: “The StuRa therefore decides to exclude from any ideological and financial opportunities the following groups: Sozialistische Organisation Solidarität (SOL), Kommunistische Organisation (KO, Solidarischer Studententreff, Arbeitersport, Zweieck), Rote Wende / Roter Aufbau, International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), Revolution und Kommunistischer Aufbau (KA, KJ, KF) as well as groups or organisers who cooperate with the aforementioned.”

The IYSSE supports the international protests against the genocide in Gaza and fights to build a mass socialist movement among the working class and youth against war and its root cause, the capitalist system.



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