

Students set up pro-Palestine protest camp at Frankfurt's Goethe University

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Despite attacks by the police and slanders in the media, protests against Israel's genocide in Gaza are continuing to spread globally and across Germany. A quarter of a million people demonstrated in London on Saturday, while around 10,000 took to the streets in Berlin. Palestine protest camps have now been set up at over 200 universities worldwide.

On May 20 a protest camp was also set up on the campus of Frankfurt's Goethe University. "Free, free Gaza!" and "Goethe take a side, justice or genocide", were chanted by the students who set up the camp, which they plan to keep up for the whole week. Banners and posters hang everywhere, reading, for example, "The power of the people is stronger than the people in power."

"We felt it was absolutely necessary to speak out against the genocide in Gaza," explained Daniel Shuminov, who had organised the camp. "We can't stand the deafening silence on the part of the university." In fact, Shuminov noted, the university management has not remained entirely silent: "Whenever there were pro-Palestinian expressions of opinion at the university, they were branded anti-Semitic."

The university management had tried to prevent the camp using all sorts of bureaucratic means. In a press release, university president Enrico Schleiff claimed that the camp posed a threat to Jewish students—an accusation that particularly offended Shuminov, who has a Jewish family background.

At an impromptu press conference, he explained the purpose of the camp together with fellow students Muad and Rhabab: "In Rafah, people have nothing left but tents to sleep in. We are showing solidarity with them. We are part of a global movement of over 200 such camps." The students pointed out that the ongoing Israeli attacks on civilian life in the Gaza Strip had already killed thousands of pupils, students and teachers. "On January 17, 2024, the last university in Gaza was destroyed."

In a press release on May 17, the university presidium accused protesters of violence, intimidation and antisemitism, without any grounds to do so. The young people responded with a written statement in which they said: "This prejudgement and defamation of students is discriminatory and worrying. ... The only real existing climate of intimidation is created by the university management by invoking a police state of emergency."

In fact, the camp is monitored around the clock by dozens of police officers who patrol the campus and position themselves in front of the main buildings. On the first evening, police officers even entered the protest camp to check the personal details of several women wearing hijabs—a clear provocation to intimidate participants.

The camp has also been subjected to systematic defamation in the press, which has, for example, echoed university president Schleiff's claim that the protest poses a threat to the university kindergarten. As usual, criticism of Israel's brutal aggression is equated with "antisemitism." This applies to all of the main German papers based in Frankfurt—the *FAZ*, *Frankfurter Neue Presse* and *Frankfurter Rundschau*.

The tabloid *Bild* has stood out in the slanderous smear campaign, labelling the protest an "Israel-hater camp" in the title of an article devoted to the protest. Recalling the language of the Nazis, the text reads: "First Berlin, then Munich and now Frankfurt: Israel-haters want to poison the next university with their slogans."

Bild quotes the Hessian state antisemitism commissioner Uwe Becker (CDU), who adds fuel to the fire with the mendacious claim that it is "terrible how the hatred of Israel is spreading at yet another university. Left-wing anti-Semitism is increasingly mixing with Islamist hostility towards Jews."

This is nothing new for the students at the protest camp. As several of them told the WSWS, it has recently been

impossible to draw attention to the issue of Gaza at Goethe University without being immediately denounced as antisemitic. Becker, who as the antisemitism commissioner holds an official function in the state of Hesse, has threatened them with ex-matriculation.

The hypocrisy of this supposedly liberal university, which had large plaques erected to mark the 75th anniversary of Germany's post war Basic Law, quoting Article 5, for example, seems particularly cynical: "Everyone has the right to freely express and disseminate his opinion in speech, writing and pictures ... There is no censorship."

With their protest camp, the students say they want to initiate an open discourse at the university about the war in Gaza. The aim of this week is to discuss the most appropriate demands.

As Shuminov said: "We all agree that we are against the genocide in Gaza. But how we can implement this effectively at a university level is what we want to discuss here this week." The students hope that the university will "see the protest camp as an opportunity to open up urgently needed spaces for discourse."

Goethe University is under strong pressure, however, from its sponsors and financiers, which include the City of Frankfurt, the State of Hesse, the European Central Bank, the Deutsche Bundesbank and the Frankfurt Chamber of Industry and Commerce. On its website, the Frankfurt Chamber of Industry and Commerce lists its close ties to Israeli companies: "Over 7,000 German and Israeli companies maintain long-standing business relationships with each other and generated a bilateral trade and service volume of over 11 billion euros in 2022," it reads.

In addition to political interests, there are also hard-hitting economic interests behind the public denunciation of any criticism of Israel's brutal aggression against the Palestinians as "Israel-hatred" and the systematic and false equation of anti-Zionism with "anti-Semitism."

For this reason, the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) stress it is necessary to turn to workers in the factories and workplaces in order to mobilise them—independently of their nationalist trade union leaders—for a stop to arms supplies to Israel and a general strike movement against war. The SGP is fighting for this perspective in the European elections.

Millions of people have demonstrated against the horrific genocide in the Gaza Strip over the last seven months. They must realise that a change of course is necessary because their protests are being met with

hostility on the part of governments, mainstream parties, the trade unions and university administrations. In fact they are reacting with increasingly brutal attacks and bans, as the most recent ban on the Palestine Solidarity organisation in Duisburg last week has shown.

In order to clarify these questions, Mehring Books has published the book *The Logic of Zionism. From Nationalist Myth to Genocide in Gaza* containing five lectures by David North. They analyse the reactionary foundations of Zionism in historical, ideological and political terms.

In one of the lectures, North castigates "the cynicism, hypocrisy, demagoguery and unrestrained lying that drives the campaign to discredit opposition to Israel's onslaught against Gaza as antisemitic." As he explains:

The current campaign exemplifies a process which might be called "semantic inversion," in which a word is utilized in a manner and within a context that is the exact opposite of its real and long-accepted meaning. Through sheer force of repetition, amplified by all the powers at the disposal of the state and the corporate media, the meaning of a term is fundamentally altered. The intended outcome of the falsification is the degrading of popular consciousness and its ability to understand reality.

North explains that such slanders are an important weapon in the efforts of Israel and its imperialist accomplices to intimidate and isolate all those who protest against the genocide of the Palestinians.

His lectures constitute an urgent appeal to the working class to rise up internationally in defence of the Palestinians.



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