

Germany: Protest and tribunal oppose Gaza genocide, state repression

Our reporters
30 June 2025

On Saturday, around 500 people demonstrated in Duisburg against the genocide in Gaza and the repression directed at those who express solidarity with the Palestinians. Following the demonstration, those affected gave testimony at a public tribunal.

As if to prove the point of holding the tribunal against the state's abrogation of democratic rights, the police hindered the course of the demonstration. From the outset, they repeatedly intervened to instruct speakers at the brief opening rally that—contrary to the conditions imposed by the police themselves—some statements and slogans were not permitted. Later, the police clarified: Shouting slogans such as “Yalla Intifada” was not a criminal offence but could nonetheless bring a prosecution.

On another occasion, a protester carrying a flag of the group “Thawra” was pulled out of the march because the flag supposedly resembled the emblem of a banned organisation. Later on the tribunal platform, the young man was able to explain that this was pure harassment. The flag had already been the subject of two court proceedings, and ultimately the Berlin Regional Court had ruled that it could not be prohibited.

Many people then described the repressive measures they faced. Several students spoke of the reprisals they had encountered at universities. Palestinians applying for asylum or citizenship in Germany had cancelled their participation in the event out of fear of reprisals. One anonymous voice message from an affected person was played to the tribunal.

“I wanted to be part of society; I worked and was involved,” the speaker began. But when they had applied for German citizenship, they were summoned to a security interview where they were asked “many personal questions.” “They questioned my identity. They wanted to know what I think about Israel” and about “the Palestinian issue.” “I felt under pressure: I was afraid.” The individual now believes that simply because they are Palestinian, they have no real chance of being granted German citizenship.

Inga Matthes, a lawyer from Berlin, then spoke about the laws that the last government, a coalition of the Social Democrats (SPD), Liberal Democrats (FDP) and Greens, had already passed. They were intended to bind all foreign nationals seeking naturalisation—but especially those from the Arab

world—to the German state doctrine of support for Israel. But as she explained, this affects not only applicants but also German citizens. She recounted two cases in Regensburg and Halle in which people had their German citizenship revoked on the grounds that they had “made false statements in the naturalisation process.” In reality, they had “in another context”—at demonstrations or on social media—rejected Israel's right to exist. “Yes,” she concluded, “the repression is being further tightened. This is how the present course of foreign policy is being enforced domestically. All protest is to be criminalised.”

Melanie Schweizer and Ahmad Othman reported on their dismissals. Schweizer had worked as a legal adviser at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in the department for business and human rights. She had supported protests against the genocide from the outset.

When she was then nominated as a candidate for the Bundestag (federal parliament) by Mera25 (the political project of former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis), “everything happened quite quickly.” She was smeared as an Israel-hater, with the tabloid *Bild* particularly prominent in the campaign. In a personnel interview, she was told she had breached her duty of moderation as a civil servant through statements such as: “The Greens are supporters of genocide.” Because she did not recant her views and insisted on her fundamental rights, she was informed in a second meeting “that I was suspended with immediate effect and also dismissed.”

Speaking to the WSW, Melanie Schweizer explained why this amounted to a professional ban: “I am now de facto barred from working in the civil service or in the judiciary.” She had once planned to become a judge, “but of course that has now been shelved.” “I probably will never be able to work in a public authority again. I can still work as a lawyer and have now returned to practising law. So, I still have options.” But the [democratic] space was “getting ever narrower.”

From Berlin, Palestinian journalist Hebh Jamal, originally from New York, had travelled to Duisburg. She is currently working on a film about the “German state doctrine” of supporting Israel. She reported that Palestinians were using their mobile phones to document their own genocide in order to plead for help from the world. In contrast, the major German

media spread the lies of the Israeli government and refused to correct or remove clearly debunked falsehoods from their websites.

As Hebh Jamal recounted, four of her husband's cousins were recently killed in Rafah as they queued for food being distributed by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF). An Israeli soldier has meanwhile confirmed in *Haaretz* that these distribution points are nothing but "killing fields" for the Israeli and US governments. The food distribution is a cynical pretext to shoot starving and desperate Palestinians. They are therefore part of the genocide.

She accused the German media: "They are the propaganda wing of the Israeli government," making them complicit in the genocide in Gaza. She pointed out that even state broadcasters ARD and ZDF camera teams, when they show up at a demonstration like this one, had no intention of reporting objectively but only of rigging another accusation. "That is why they ask you about your position on 7 October—but not about the 15 family members you have lost in Gaza."

Indeed, a team from the ARD programme *Kontraste* was present at the tribunal, apparently with exactly such a mission. Participants told the WSWs that the reporter employed suggestive questions exclusively trying to provoke statements that could be used in a report against the protest and its organisers.

A Duisburg resident named Fikret listened to the speeches at the tribunal. Referring to Hebh Jamal's account of the genocide being broadcast in real time, he said: "In the Second World War, many Germans claimed they knew nothing about the Holocaust. Today no one can say we knew nothing. The Palestinians are documenting their own genocide. Everyone can see it."

His friend Emin added: "That's why I find it so sad that the organisations claiming to represent Muslim and Arab communities remain so silent. They say nothing about the crimes in Gaza. Obviously, they have interests other than standing up against this."

Mehring Verlag, the German-language publisher of the WSWs and Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) had a stall on site to inform people about the closure of its business bank account and the personal account of its managing director by Deutsche Bank. Several tribunal attendees bought David North's book *The Logic of Zionism—From Nationalist Myth to Gaza Genocide*.

While the tribunal's organisers presented a powerful picture of repression and the legal struggle against it, discussions with participants made clear that opposition is growing among workers and young people.

Many supported the protests and demonstrations but stressed that more needed to be done. Many agreed—or themselves raised—that there must be an international movement against war and capitalism, in order to stop not only the Israeli government but also those backing it—above all Washington,

Berlin, London and Paris.

This was also emphasised by Petra, who reads the WSWs and supports the SGP. She had travelled from the Cologne area to attend the demonstration and tribunal.

"I go to many demos for Gaza," she began. "What is happening in Gaza is the height of barbarism." She pointed to the international context, saying: "The wars currently being waged—for example in Ukraine—are all connected. This already verges on the gravitational field of a Third World War. We really have to be careful."

She mentioned that the German government had released no less than €1 trillion for rearmament and decided to rapidly meet NATO's demand for military spending of 5 percent of GDP. All this proved, "It is not just about Gaza."

She believes, "Many people have no idea what is really going on." Chancellor Friedrich Merz's description of Israel's genocide as "dirty work" was not merely wrong. "That is outright Nazi language. For me, it is fascistoid."

The Gaza demonstrations were important, she continued, "but we need a political mobilisation." This is a worldwide, global problem: "Workers must organise themselves. Independently of the trade unions, independently of all the [Bundestag] parties—including the Left Party, who all support this."

However, this perspective was not shared by the organisers of the tribunal. They had deliberately decided that no political organisations should speak. This meant the tribunal was oriented towards appeals to those in power and to the established legal system—even though strong evidence was presented that fundamentally contradicted this.

In contrast, Dietmar Gaisenkersting, deputy chair of the SGP, set out a clear perspective in a video statement delivered at the edge of the tribunal.

He stressed the necessity of transforming opposition to the genocide in Gaza and the drive to war into a conscious struggle against imperialism and of mobilising the international working class against it: "The genocide in Gaza is an integral part and preparation for the emerging world war of the imperialist powers—against Iran, Russia and ultimately China."

He therefore called on people to get in touch with the SGP "to join us in turning the broad opposition to genocide and war into a fight against imperialism and war—for socialism!"



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