

Journalism award withdrawn from young German media activist opposing genocide

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Early September saw yet another blatant case of censorship linked to unjustified accusations of antisemitism. The young activist Judith Scheytt, who in January had received a prize for her posts and videos on Instagram and TikTok criticising media coverage of the genocide in Gaza by the Israeli armed forces, was forced—after the intervention of the pro-Zionist Cologne Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation—to hand back the award and prize statue.

Just before her graduation, the then high school student had been awarded the non-endowed “special commendation” of the Donnepp Award for Critical Media for her work on social media, especially her Instagram reels. Since November 2023, Scheytt had focused on the one-sided reporting of the German media on the Middle East conflict, and the human rights crimes of the Israeli army (IDF) in the Gaza Strip.

The Donnepp Award is named after Bert Donnepp, founder of the Grimme Institute, a respected non-profit organisation covering media and communication, and annually awards prizes for outstanding achievements in radio and television. The Donnepp Award is presented together with two “special commendations” each year for outstanding critical media. According to the award’s statutes, it honours “competent journalistic engagement with questions of radio, television, the press and/or overarching media issues” which “contributes to recognising the specific achievements of these mass media, their content, their structures and/or their effects.”

The Donnepp Award, however, is not bestowed by the institute itself, but independently by the Friends of the Grimme Prize Association, which appoints a jury for this purpose. Of the six jury members who awarded Scheytt, three were also members of the association’s board: journalist Jörg Schieb (also chairman of the Friends of Grimme Association), honorary chairman Ulrich Spies, and Grimme Prize director Lucia Eskes, alongside Steffen Grimberg (head of media services at the Catholic News Agency) and director Maik Große Lochtmann. The jury chair was the previous year’s laureate, author and

communications scholar Nadia Zaboura, who had proposed Scheytt. The jury unanimously endorsed the award.

The main laureate in January was Annika Schneider of Übermedien. The two “special commendations” went to cabaret artist Oliver Kalkofe and the then 17-year-old Judith Scheytt, who describes herself on Instagram as an activist for “climate justice and human rights.”

The jury praised Scheytt’s “wealth of knowledge” and “analytical brilliance,” with which she exposed false information about the Gaza war in detail. Her “pointed and challenging analyses” had “created open spaces for discussion,” it said in January. Scheytt was producing “a new and truly contemporary form of journalism with her critical media on Instagram,” according to the validation published by the Grimme Institute.

Scheytt’s Instagram channel supports her criticism with studies and sources, as noted in the commendation. She openly speaks of genocide, apartheid and war crimes, and accuses German media of marginalising Palestinian voices. For example, she drew on a study by Fabian Goldmann, which showed that of headlines analysed (*Bild, Zeit, Spiegel, Tagesschau*), 43.3 percent drew on Israeli sources, but only 5 percent on Palestinian ones.

The jury praised her “pointed and, in the best sense, challenging video analyses.” She had engagingly and incisively exposed the grossest breaches of journalistic professionalism and integrity, dissecting “double standards, framings, clichés and false information down to the smallest detail.” Her focus was particularly on “German reporting on the Middle East.”

In an Instagram video posted after graduating high school, Scheytt revealed that she had been stripped of the award as early as April. Jörg Schieb of the Friends of Grimme board had phoned her mother to say so. When she herself asked for the reasons, she was told her media criticism was “structurally antisemitic.”

The first attack against the award was an article in the staunchly pro-Israel *Die Welt*, written by Mirna Funk. Great granddaughter of the East German writer Stephan Hermlin,

Funk found her way into journalism in 2018 with a *Vogue* column and now writes an erotic column for *Cosmopolitan*. Since converting to Judaism, she has become a vehement defender of the Israeli government and contributes to right-wing outlets like *Die Welt* and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

But what proved decisive was an email from the Cologne Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation, which apparently threatened to launch a media campaign against the association and the Grimme Institute unless the award was rescinded.

This society is a pro-Zionist propaganda organisation that backs the far-right Netanyahu government, supports genocide against Palestinians, and brands any criticism as antisemitic. Next month it is hosting Arye Sharuz Shalcar, Israeli army spokesman and right-wing Zionist, to present his “war diary.” On its website he promotes the event with the words: “Why does the world show so little understanding for our struggle for survival? ... As spokesman of the IDF, I try to explain Israel’s new reality—80 years after the end of the war—to German political and media leaders.”

Under the threat of this Zionist organisation, which has close ties to the North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) state government, the board of the Friends of Grimme disgracefully caved in and rescinded its award for Judith Scheytt’s work.

When she asked why she had to return the prize, Scheytt received a nearly 40-page document with absurd reasoning from chairman Jörg Schieb. Among other things, her videos were accused of omitting essential historical-political context and many “security aspects” of Israel. Her content was deemed “purely activist”—supposedly violating the award’s statutes. In convoluted jargon, the document further accused her of “selective contextualisation,” “terminological trivialisation” and “media de-realisation.”

Grimme Institute director Ci?dem Uzuno?lu also suddenly backed rescinding the award, allegedly to avoid antisemitism allegations against the organisation. Since 80 percent of its budget comes from the NRW state government, the institute has adapted itself to official policy and its weaponisation of antisemitism smears. The jury was not involved in the decision to rescind; several members, including chair Nadia Zaboura, expressly disagreed with it.

Even Annika Schneider, the main prize-winner, returned her award—including the €5,000 prize money—in protest. She said that while she did not agree with Scheytt on every point, the association had failed to provide proof of antisemitism: “I cannot accept a prize for ‘good journalism’ from an association that does not itself uphold its principles.” She added, “The withdrawal of the award was carried out in

secret. The association issued no statement, it did not inform the other winners. It simply bypassed several jury members, not even telling them the award had been revoked. For that reason, I return my award.”

Scheytt herself is now aboard the flotilla currently heading to Gaza to break the Israeli blockade and deliver aid. She expresses confidence the Global Sumud Flotilla mission will succeed, repeatedly declaring: “In the long run, it is more dangerous to live in a world where states and other powers can commit war crimes and genocide—with no consequences.”

The revocation of Judith Scheytt’s award contains important lessons. The one-sided pro-Israel reporting on the genocide in Gaza and the Israeli army’s horrendous war crimes, which she highlighted in her online work, is not merely unprofessional journalism but official state policy.

The Israeli government could not sustain its terror against Palestinians without the active backing and military aid of Washington, Berlin and other NATO-member governments. Criticism of this support is not to be tolerated.

The slanderous charge of antisemitism serves to intimidate. Under the Nazis, antisemitic agitation was used to direct the anger of ruined petty bourgeois layers against Jews. Socialists resolutely fought this poison. Now the false “antisemitism campaign” is being used to criminalise anyone who speaks out against oppression and militarism.

The cowardly capitulation of the Grimme Institute to Zionist pressure differs in no way from the behaviour of all the establishment parties and state institutions. In other words: there is only one way to fight genocide and war—mobilising the working class internationally on the basis of a socialist programme against capitalism and war.

This is the struggle taken up by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), and we invite Judith Scheytt and all her followers to join the IYSSE.



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