

Berlin police break up Palestine congress –

Freedom of Speech becomes a Farce

Martin Suchanek

Restrictions on democratic rights are now part of the normal state of "democracy". The "unconditional solidarity" with Israel declared to be the *raison d'être* of the state by Angela Merkel and Olaf Scholz is clearly incompatible with freedom of expression.

On 12 April, this came under fire, as rarely before, in Berlin, a city that can look back on a long history of police violence and arbitrariness.

But while such repression "normally" focuses on demonstrations, occupations, blockades, plus acts of civil disobedience or the rebellion of precariously employed people, this time the attack on freedom of expression was aimed at, a democratically organised conference, the Palestine Congress.

Raison D'état ()

Solidarity with Israel has been declared, indeed glorified, as an overriding interest of Germany, even though its armed forces have just killed around 40,000 people andn well over a million people in Gaza have been driven from their homes and their cities reduced to rubble. Now hundreds of thousands are acutely threatened by hunger. With a straight face the German government, the bourgeois opposition and the media, which are effectively brought into line, cling to the fiction that Israel is just exercising its "right to self-defence, rather than waging a genocidal war of aggression. And that's not all: Germany is supporting the war not just politically and diplomatically, but also militarily. In 2023 alone, its arms exports to Israel have increased tenfold.

Consequently, this war is also being continued at home. On the one hand, this is intended to ideologically shed the guilt of German imperialism for the Holocaust, while on the other, the German state is pursuing its tangible economic and, above all, geostrategic interests.

The very exercise of the right to freedom of speech has thus become a quasi-criminal activity. For weeks ,both reactionary and supposedly liberal "democratic" opinion-makers have been calling in the media for the Palestine Congress to be banned. As this was not legally possible, demands and threats were made for days, which were carried out by the police on 12 April. Berlin's right-wing conservative mayor Karl Wegner had for weeks been threatening "rigorous intervention" at the "slightest suspicion" of unlawful

statements. In plain language, this means nothing other than the threatened criminalisation of any open criticism of the state of Israel and its racist foundations, any solidarity with Palestine, any anti-Zionism and any advocacy of the democratic rights of the Palestinian people, in particular their right to national self-determination.

Provocation

The day therefore began far-fetched and absurd harassment. The fire safety regulations and the building authorities were used as a pretext for allowing only 250 people into the premises, which can accommodate 600 people. From the outset therefore hundreds of people were prevented from attending the event. In addition, the police dragged out for hours the entire process of admitting participants.

While hundreds of people with tickets were denied entry by the authorities, the police smuggled in pro-Zionist, inflammatory journalists from the conservative daily Die Welt, which had been waging a grossly defamatory campaign against the event and its organisers' rights. In addition, the cops made the massive presence of uniformed and plainclothes police officers a condition for the event to even begin.). The Berlin police deployed some 900 officers to carry out this political mission. And they did.

Speech by Habh Jamal

Despite all this harassment, provocation and police-state methods, (from which Putin, Erdogan, Netanyahu Biden, but also Meloni and Macron could still learn a thing or two) , the congress began with a moving speech, Hebh Jamal , a Palestinian-American journalist based in Germany. She exposed the lies, but also the cooperation of the oppressors worldwide, a cooperation that is no “conspiracy theory”, reveals the common interests of all the ruling classes in an imperialist order based on exploitation and oppression. Above all, she made it clear that a conference that highlights the crimes of the Nakba, the expulsion and oppression of the Palestinians and emphasises the complicity of German imperialism, is in itself an act of resistance.

Condemnation of this policy, which the conference promised to do, is a necessary and part of breaking of the silence, a moment of solidarity, that urges us to take action, to deepen and improve the coordination of our movement

This is exactly what the entire German political establishment wants to prevent at all costs. This ‘united front’ includes the parties of the coalition government, (the SPD, Greens, and Free Democrats (FDP) and the main Opposition Christiaan Democrats an Christian Socials (CDU-CSU), plus the far right AfD (Alternative for Germany). But shamefully it even includes parts of the Left Party (Die Linke

That is what imperialist "democracy" looks like

The video message by Salman Abu Sitta, a Palestinian author and researcher, who had been banned from entering the country by the German state due to his involvement, was stopped by the police after just a few minutes and for no apparent reason. In the end, the organisers' lawyer was given several contradictory reasons for this, which were highly questionable even under civil law. At one point, the police explained that the speech could contain passages that could be incitement to hatred. This would be investigated. On the basis that you can't have too many 'reasons' it was later added that Salman Abu Sitta was banned from political activity in Germany.

The police could not answer when this was decided and by whom, nor did they know whether the playing of a video message even fell under the ban. But who needs reasons when you have a monopoly on the use of force available? And to dispel any doubts that the right to freedom of assembly and freedom of speech was being trampled underfoot, the congress and all subsequent events were banned for both Saturday and Sunday.

The police were able to break up and disperse the Congress. But they will neither silence us nor will they achieve their goal of destroying our movement, which is growing and becoming stronger.

On the contrary. The arbitrary dissolution of the congress and the attack on freedom of expression not only reveals the repressive character of the police. They also illustrate the anti-democratic character of German government policy. And they show the close connection between imperialist politics and the need to maintain a monopoly of "public opinion". In addition to the repression, we are also confronted with orchestrated agitation and slander, including a massive wave of anti-Palestinian, anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism.

In our opinion, the fact that the German media is also agitating against comrades from the ArbeiterInnenmacht organisation and the youth group REVOLUTION only shows that we have done something right. However, we do not want to forget that the German establishment has also shown its anti-Semitic side in recent weeks when it publicly defamed anti-Zionist Jews, especially the comrades of the "Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East", and the Berlin savings bank blocked their association account. Above all, however, we must not forget that it is above all our Palestinian comrades who are being brutally attacked, whose associations and organisations are being threatened and criminalised and over whom the sword of Damocles of deportation hangs, while at the same time their friends and relatives are dying or being expelled.

Today, on 12 April 2024, the Wegners and Giffeys, the Scholzs and Baerbocks have been able to dissolve our congress. They have the means to do so. But they may not be too sure of their "success", their "victory" over our democratic rights - and they certainly won't enjoy it for too long. Even if they managed to dissolve our congress, it became – as one of the little ironies of history – even better known around the world. Above all, the repression made far more people aware of the reactionary, anti-democratic character of German capitalism than our speeches, contributions, discussions and resolutions alone could have done. German imperialism in particular has spent decades building

up the image of being comparatively "democratic" and "value-based". It is currently exposing this self-congratulatory lie itself.

We will make sure that it sticks in their throat. They can ban a congress, but they will not break our resistance, our will to fight, our determination. Because, unlike them, we are fighting for a just cause, for freedom and self-determination for the Palestinian people, indeed for a world without exploitation and oppression.