

Pro-Palestinian group banned and genocide opponent sacked in German city of Duisburg

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On May 16, 2024, the Interior Minister for the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), Herbert Reul (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), banned the Palestine Solidarity Duisburg group (PSDU). The ban criminalised any criticism of the Israeli genocide in Gaza and the federal government's war policy. Now one of those affected by the ban, Ahmad Othman, has been dismissed by his employer on what are clearly political grounds.

When Interior Minister Reul issued the ban back in May, police searched the homes of four PSDU activists, including that of Othman. Since he had the passports of several relatives at his home, the police immediately initiated proceedings for alleged forgery. This accusation was unfounded from the outset and any proceedings were subsequently dropped. On May 16, the police also searched his workplace. Othman works as an IT specialist, mostly from home. As a result, several devices belonging to his employer were confiscated.

The far-reaching allegations in the ban order declared that the PSDU was an antisemitic organisation which supported Hamas and terror methods—charges uncritically promoted by the official media and then used to suspend Othman from working. His suspension in June 2024 was followed in mid-November by his final dismissal on December 31, 2024.

The reasons given for his dismissal are his alleged “unconstitutional attitude” due to his membership in the PSDU and his legal action opposing the ban. Othman has insisted on his right to show solidarity with the Palestinian people and speak out against the Israeli government's genocide. On this basis he was invited to speak at a number of meetings to explain what happened to him and the others affected.

The letter confirming his dismissal raises precisely

these points, i.e. that he refused to distance himself from the PSDU. His employer refers to statements made by Othman in a speech at a recent Palestine Congress in Vienna, without specifically mentioning the content, claiming that his statements at the congress made him unsuitable for his job.

His employer apparently also did not accept that Othman refused to comment on the ban in an interview and that he was only ready to do so in writing.

Most far-reaching for the young man and his professional activity is the employer's insinuation that Othman could use his position as an IT specialist to abuse the company's network for personal purposes.

As an IT employee, Othman works in the area of development and server support and thus has access to sensitive data and systems. The letter of termination states: “In light of your statements (...) and regarding the above-mentioned group (PSDU), there is concern that you no longer use the access options within the scope of your professional activities with sufficient reliability and neutrality.”

This amounts to accusing him of criminal offences, without any grounds. “As an IT specialist, one always has to deal with sensitive data and I have always handled such data correctly,” Othman explained. The accusation is baseless. On the contrary, even after the PSDU ban, he was assured that his employers were more than satisfied with his work. Nobody questioned his abilities or experience.

The reason for his termination can therefore only be understood as an blatant warning to any future employer: Beware of employing Ahmad Othman as an IT specialist. The termination is thus effectively a professional ban.

“Today it is Ahmad who is affected, but this is directed against us all!” the Committee Against the Ban

of PSDU wrote on its website.

Othman is by no means the only person to lose their job because of activities on behalf of Palestine or criticism of Israel.

Pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Germany are banned, harassed and subjected to Kafkaesque censorship regulations and artists who express criticism are sanctioned. Even scientists have to fear for their funding if they speak out too openly.

On December 11, the Halle Labour Court upheld the dismissal of Ghassan Hage. The Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle fired the Lebanese-Australian scientist in February. The institute cited as grounds for his dismissal social media posts in which he condemned the Israeli mass murder of Palestinians. The Halle Labour Court rejected his extraordinary dismissal on formal grounds, but upheld his ordinary dismissal dated March 31, 2024.

In its article on the banning of the PSDU, the *World Socialist Web Site* noted: “When the Verfassungsschutz (Germany’s domestic intelligence service) included the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei in its 2019 annual report as an allegedly “left-wing extremist” party, opening up the party for state surveillance, the SGP warned that this would prepare the ground for criminalising “booksellers who distributed Marxist literature, workers who strike for higher wages or peace activists with the stroke of a pen.” This is now confirmed by the banning of Palestine Solidarity Duisburg.”

The domestic intelligence service, the German government and the courts did not cite violations of the law against the SGP, but rather its policies. What was criminalised was the “striving for an egalitarian, democratic and socialist society” or criticising “alleged nationalism, imperialism and militarism.”

The PSDU is also not accused of any criminal offence. It has been banned because it did not submit to German state policy regarding Israel and protested—peacefully and in words—against the murder of Palestinians in Gaza. Due to its advocacy of a democratic, secular and peaceful state in Palestine, the organisation, along with many other people worldwide, including numerous Jews, are being defamed as antisemites.

The NRW Interior Ministry cited as grounds for the ban positions shared by the majority of UN member

countries and the International Court of Justice. The ban order speaks of an “unproven genocide” despite all evidence to the contrary. The ministry could not make it clearer that the ban is an act of state arbitrariness, censorship and oppression.

On November 15, 2024, almost exactly six months after the PSDU ban, the Higher Administrative Court of North Rhine-Westphalia rejected an urgent appeal against the ban. It adopted the assertions of the NRW Interior Ministry and in some cases even sharpened them up legally. While the ministry had fantasised about a legally questionable “spiritual support” for Hamas, the OVG unceremoniously deleted the word “spiritual.” The court ruled that the PSDU had “downplayed Hamas and thus clearly gave it support.” In the meantime a constitutional complaint has been filed against this interim injunction. The main proceedings against the PSDU ban are still pending.

Othman filed an unfair dismissal suit at the end of November and announced that he would use all legal means to get his job back. “I know that this is not just about me. If I lose, we all lose.”

The more blatantly the German government supports the government in Israel politically, financially and with weapons and the more obvious the genocide in Palestine becomes, the more vehemently it acts against those opposing it.

This has nothing to do with protecting Jewish lives or making reparations for the Holocaust. Germany, like the United States and other European states, is using Israel as a bridgehead for its imperialist interests in the Middle East and thereby threatening and intimidating the entire region.



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