

**Anna Sansom: Please can you explain why you are planning a demonstration outside the Bundestag?**

Adrian Piper: The work, *Wahlkampagne*, is directed toward the German educational system, which at a much earlier historical moment was the best in the world, provided the role model and structural foundation for every other high-functioning educational system in the world, and now is in very bad shape. It invites German citizens and residents to join me in demanding a basic condition for the successful transmission of knowledge in any field without which no other reforms are meaningful, namely a student-teacher ratio of no more than 15 to 1 per class maximum. That is the meaning of the “≤15:1” formula at the bottom of the sandwich boards and lapel pins, which my foundation, the Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin, is distributing free of charge in Berlin.

We are also inviting owners of buildings in Berlin to allow us to mount the three signs, in some configuration, on the facades of their buildings, also free of charge. In English translation, the signs say, “WITHOUT EDUCATION → NO CHANCE → NO CHOICE” . The German word *Wahl* means both “choice” and “vote”: 2021 is election year in Germany, so *Wahlkampagne* is targeting Germany’s political class, virtually all of whom are up for (re-)election. We want them to see our sandwich boards and take our lapel pins as they walk into and out of work at the Bundestag.

The aim of the work is to encourage all German citizens and residents to surround German politicians with reminders – in front of the Bundestag, on all of the buildings, and on everyone’s lapels – that a first-class education for everyone is a necessary precondition for solving any of the other pressing problems – poverty, immigration, COVID-19, climate change, political extremism, etc. – to which they regularly give pride of place.

Soon we will be introducing the first six buildings in the center of Berlin that have volunteered to display the signs on their facades. So please stay tuned for that!

**AS: When did you set up the Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin?**

AP: I founded [the Adrian Piper Research Archive](#) in 2002, because I thought I was going to die very soon. Instead I went straight to heaven, i.e. I moved to Germany! ;D There I set up [the Foundation](#) in 2009.

**AS: Why do you think that the German education system needs changing?**

AP: The teaching faculty at all educational levels is painfully understaffed because it is underfunded, both locally and at the national level. In recent years, only around 5% of Germany’s annual national budget has been allocated to education. At the grammar- and high school level, as well as at the university level, the result is classes that are so overcrowded that nothing that deserves the name “teaching” can possibly take place in them. And the instructors are often so overworked and demoralized by the enormity of the task that they are in despair. Of course there are exceptions. But these mostly prove the rule. Germany needs to spend at least three times as much on education as it does now, in order to bring the system up to speed.

**AS: Where does your information come from that the classes are overcrowded?**

AP: First of all from my own experience, of being offered teaching positions and realizing, in the negotiation process, that I could not possibly meet these demands. By talking to my colleagues in universities all over Germany, in various academic specialties, comparing notes, and attending many pedagogical conferences for over a decade, I discovered that in fact no one can or even tries to meet them, because the demands are physically impossible to meet. My database on this topic is quite extensive.

**AS: Are you referring to classes in schools generally or in art academies?**

AP: I am referring to classes at every educational level and in every educational subject, including the more practically oriented courses of instruction. And yes, this does include art academies.

**AS: Why do you believe that classes are more overcrowded now than 10 years ago?**

AP: The more politicians subordinate educational institutions to business interests, the more educational basics are underfunded. This holds true in all developed countries. Less funding means fewer teachers, and therefore larger class sizes. [Here is a cartoon on that topic](#). I created over a decade ago for King's College, London. But the model of education that was the pride of Germany – the tutorial system, very small classes – was developed to serve the German aristocracy in the 19th century. After WWII, that system did not adapt well to the requirements of democracy, with its large influx of students from the middle, working and dispossessed classes. Germany should have matched the increased number of students with a proportionally increased number of teachers. But it couldn't, because the country had not already trained all those teachers. So it had no resources to draw on then, and therefore very few to draw on now. That has got to change.

**AS: Have you contacted the education ministry about this? Or directors of schools and art academies? If so, what response did you get? If not, why not?**

AP: Attached is the [open letter I wrote, as part of an event at the Venice Biennale of 2015, to Germany's Minister of Education and Research, Dr. Johanna Wanka](#), that invited her into dialogue about the issue of overcrowding and understaffing in German educational institutions. Her representative responded by referring me to a different department. I have also raised this issue at every pedagogical conference I have attended, all of which invariably include representatives of the German government. They are not listening, do not want to listen, and do not even want to talk about it publicly. I have also discussed this matter with presidents of German universities and art academies. They all say it is in the hands of the politicians, which in Germany is true.

**AS: Why is this matter of such importance to you personally – are you also a lecturer or professor?**

AP: Yes, I am a retired Professor Emeritus of the American Philosophical Association. I taught academic philosophy at six universities in the U.S.; and before that, I tutored underprivileged students when I myself was an undergraduate at college. The issue is important to me for many reasons. At a purely self-interested level, I want to live in a society defined by a high level of literacy and competence because that makes my life easier, safer, and healthier. But there is more to it than that. Germany is such an advanced society in so many other ways that it is quite a shock to discover how unwilling it is to acknowledge the urgency of a first-class educational system for *everyone* in order to solve its many lingering problems.

**AS: How have you been reaching out to the owners of buildings in Berlin to mount the three signs "WITHOUT EDUCATION → NO CHANCE → NO CHOICE"?**

AP: We have announced *Wahlkampagne*, and encouraged property owners in Berlin to contact us if they would like to volunteer their building facades, through the [APRA web page](#), and also through [my interview for the German national newspaper \*Der Tagesspiegel\*](#).

**AS: Which are the first six buildings in the centre of Berlin that have volunteered to display the signs on their facades?**

AP: You will have to wait and see! We will announce it publicly when they are ready.

**AS: When are they going to do this?**

AP: As soon as we can get the signs up!

**AS: Have you launched protests like this before? If so, what can you tell me about how they went?**

AP: No, never. I haven't done something like this since I marched in the Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960s.

**AS: What changes are you hoping to have implemented? Are you petitioning the education ministry to pass new guidelines, for instance?**

AP: The focus of this artwork, *Wahlkampagne*, is restricted exclusively to the aim of implementing a student-teacher ratio of no more than 15 to 1 per class maximum, in every classroom, in every subject, in every educational institution, in every state in Germany. It is written into the rules governing the APRA Foundation Berlin that *Wahlkampagne* will continue – long past my death, of course – until that aim is achieved. No other educational reform can be effective unless this one is implemented first.

**AS: Are you able to tell me what teaching positions you were offered in Germany?**

AP: No, unfortunately that information is confidential. What I can say is that there were several, and that the negotiations followed the same pattern in each case. I had to compare notes with my colleagues before I realized that my experience was the norm rather than an anomaly.

**AS: Is there anything else you can tell me about the May 15th demonstration?**

AP: Only that we already have five volunteers to wear the sandwich boards and distribute the pins, so there are five sandwich boards still available for people to wear, in case anyone else wants to join up.

**AS: Will you and your followers be holding placards reading 'Ohne Bildung → keine Chance → keine Wahl' and '≤15:1'?**

AP: Yes. '≤15:1' is on the front of the sandwich board, and 'Ohne Bildung → keine Chance → keine Wahl' is on the back.

**AS: How are you generating support to attract demonstrators, please?**

AP: Just through the means already described: [the website](#), the email announcement, and the [Tagesspiegel interview](#). We are not exerting any additional pressure on anyone to participate because I believe that in order to endure and persist over the long term that will be necessary to realize the ≤15:1 educational goal, this action needs to be a fully voluntary group initiative that citizens and residents of Germany recognize as serving their own best interests, and through which they can express their will to the politicians who are supposed to be representing them.