

Iranian exiles defy massive police presence to protest Khatami's visit to Germany

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Mass protests by Iranian exiles accompanied the state visit of Iranian President Mohamed Khatami to Germany. The major news media in Germany, in an effort to generate popular hostility to the demonstrators, uniformly attributed the protests to the efforts of the People's Mujahedeen, which they described as a “terrorist organisation.”

In advance of Khatami's visit, the German government announced that the “highest safety precautions” would be taken, and implemented even stricter security measures than those employed for US President Bill Clinton's recent visit. As of July 7, the Schengen agreement, which allows unhindered passenger traffic between participating European Union countries, was suspended. At international airports in Frankfurt, Munich, Cologne-Bonn and Berlin, and at border crossings, some 8,000 Iranians were blocked from entering Germany.

The Iranian president arrived by helicopter in the German capital, Berlin, on Monday midday. A few hours before Khatami's arrival, Berlin police searched the homes of a number of Iranian exiles. Around 50 were arrested on the mere suspicion that they were planning “hostile” protest actions.

Police barricades were erected on German motorways. In southern Germany around the cities of Stuttgart, Munich and Nuremberg, police officers stopped buses bringing Iranians to protest demonstrations in Berlin. A number of people were arrested.

The centre of Berlin resembled a police camp: everywhere one looked one could see officers in body armour, water cannons, armoured cars and police vans. Some police vehicles were specially equipped with buckets of paint and cleaning materials so that officers could immediately remove or cover up undesired

slogans daubed on walls or fences.

German Chancellor Schröder declared that both countries wanted to intensify their collaboration against international drug trafficking and terrorism. A commission of the German criminal investigation office is currently in Iran to pursue such ends.

On Tuesday Khatami's visit was dedicated to business deals. The president was due to speak to around 250 managers of the main employers' association in the House of the Economy.

According to news agency reports a number of deals were ready for the Iranian president's signature. The most significant, apparently, was a credit of over 1.1 billion marks for the Iranian state oil company, guaranteed by a consortium led by Deutsche Bank.

At the main protest demonstration, at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, demonstrators denounced the government in Teheran. They noted that since the so-called reformer Khatami took office, 560 executions have been carried out and there have been at least 11 public stonings. Banners declared that Schröder's invitation to Khatami “legitimises Teheran's crimes against the Iranian people”.

Many of the demonstrators referred to protests in recent weeks by students in Teheran and workers in the city of Abadan, which were suppressed with enormous brutality by the Iranian army and security forces.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with demonstrators at the Brandenburg Gate. Marvan had travelled to the demonstration with a group of about 100 Iranians from Sweden. He described the problems the group encountered attempting to cross the German border at the northern port of Rostock.

“The entire group was held up for about an hour, and over half a dozen of the group were prevented from entering Germany. In all, I have heard that over 8,000

Iranians who wanted to enter Germany have been stopped at the border.

“I do not like the politics of the German government at all. They should not have relations with such a killer as Khatami. He is no better than Pinochet. I ask myself how is it possible for the German government to extend a welcome to this man?”

“Khatami has been in power for three years now and nothing has changed for the better. The Mullahs still retain their power. The government operates as a dictatorship that has nothing to do with ordinary people. If there was to be change they would all have to shave their beards, but the fact is, the religious fundamentalists are still in power.

“It is a mistake to regard Khatami as some sort of Martin Luther. He is head of the Security Council and in charge of the troops. The only reason Khatami is in power is to try and prevent a popular uprising.”

The WSWs asked Marvan about the recent show trial of Iranian Jews. “It is completely wrong,” he said. “There are 30,000 Jews living peacefully in Iran, but now the Islamic fundamentalists use this trial to try and impress their Islamic neighbours. It is all used for propaganda purposes.”

One of Marvan's friends added, “It is not possible to reform this system. Look at the situation for ethnic minorities and women in Iran. There have been three hundred hangings and public executions under Khatami—women have been stoned, people have had their eyes gouged out. The social situation is also desperate. Drug addiction has reached horrendous levels in the big cities such as Teheran. And Khatami himself is a product of the fundamentalist apparatus.

“He was the head of the propaganda machine for Khomeini during the Iran-Iraq war. For that he has the deaths of thousands on his conscience. After the war he worked as a senior advisor to Khomeini and now he controls the security services. And the German government welcomes such a murderer. I can only assume that for the Red-Green government in Germany money talks louder than human rights.”

The WSWs also interviewed Arash, who has lived and studied in Germany for the past 18 years and regards himself as a social democrat. He related that there had been a number of deaths in recent confrontations marking the first anniversary of the mass student protests in Teheran. At a demonstration in the town of

Shatereh, citizens protesting the lack of drinking water were fired on by security forces. Dozens were killed, including children.

Arash expressed his disappointment with the German Red-Green coalition government.

“For a long time I have hoped that the Greens and the Social Democrats would support our struggle for democracy. Schröder and Fischer were previously both leaders of the student movement and opposed dictatorships for some time. In 1967 Fischer demonstrated against the visit of the Persian Shah to Berlin. However, as soon as they come to power and begin to enjoy a luxurious lifestyle, they forget the ideals for which they formerly fought.

“Yesterday students demonstrated once again in Teheran and were attacked by security forces. And the man who is responsible for that has been invited to Germany today. I had always respected the social democrats. Today I am just speechless.

“The German government should not cooperate with a government of the Mullahs. We need a democracy. Democracy means a free press and the legalisation of parties which can represent the people in parliament.”

Germany's unparalleled security measures and demonstrative show of solidarity with the Iranian president underscore the fact that the current government in Berlin is at least as indifferent to democratic rights as its predecessors, which worked closely first with the Shah of Iran and then with the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini.



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