

Ban on "Revolutionary May Day demonstration" in Berlin

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At short notice the interior minister for Berlin, Eckart Werthebach (Christian Democratic Union), has banned the annual so-called "Revolutionary May Day demonstration" due to take place in the Berlin suburb of Kreuzberg.

The ban on the demonstration was announced just a few days after the interior minister declared a ban on a May Day demonstration planned by the neo-fascist NPD (National Party of Germany). In the meantime, a Berlin court has lifted the ban on the NPD demonstration. As a consequence, the extreme right-wing mob has been given permission to march on May Day while the anti-fascist demonstration remains banned.

The ban on the May Day demonstration is unique in the post-war history of Germany. In justifying the ban, the interior ministry of the Berlin coalition of the CDU and SPD (Social Democratic Party) referred to anticipated violence on the part of the organisers and participants of the planned demo.

Since 1987, autonome (anarchist) organisations, which are strongly represented in the Berlin suburb of Kreuzberg, have organised the "Revolutionary May Day demonstration" on an annual basis and several thousand, mainly young, people have regularly taken part. This year the application for the demonstration came from the organisation "Anti-fascist Action Berlin" (ABB) under the motto "Prussia was always sh*t"—a response to official celebrations in Germany to commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of the founding of the state of Prussia.

The "autonome" demonstrations have regularly ended in hand-to-hand fighting between the demonstrators and the massive numbers of police employed to control the demonstrations. Many reports, for example from the demonstration of last year,

confirm that it was often the police who provoked violence, only then to intervene and attack the participants with truncheons and water cannons. Afterwards, representatives from the Berlin police and justice departments used the violence to repeatedly warn against the danger of left-wing radicalism and justify calls for intensified repressive measures.

By banning the demo in advance this year the current Interior Minister Werthebach has gone even further than his predecessor Jörg Schönbohm (CDU), who was himself notorious as a right-wing rabble-rouser.

Wolf Dieter Narr, professor for politics at the Free University in Berlin, and someone who has observed the activities around the demonstration for a number of years in a semi-professional capacity, criticised Werthebach's decision and confirmed that the source of violence on past occasions was the police and not demonstrators. He described the decision to ban the demonstration as "anti-democratic".

The chairman of the Republican Lawyers organisation, Wolfgang Kaleck, also declared the ban to be an affront to democracy and stated: "Werthebach has a vested interest in a row next week. Then he plans to tighten up the right to assemble."

The right to demonstrate is one of the most important democratic principles and the significance of this latest attack only becomes clear when one takes into consideration social relations as a whole and the current anti-social policies of the ruling SPD-Green Party coalition government.

Only recently, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder launched an attack on the unemployed in Germany, commenting to the *Bild* newspaper, "There is no right for a person to be lazy in this society." His onslaught coincided with the release of an official report on the development of poverty in Germany which documents

the gulf between rich and poor and reveals the extent to which official politics is carried out independently of the needs and wishes of the population as a whole.

Against this background the ruling elite fear that broad social discontent can rapidly take the form of action directed against the government itself. Fundamental democratic rights, such as the right to asylum, freedom of opinion and the right to found and maintain political parties, are becoming increasingly incompatible in a society riven by social inequality.

At the beginning of last week Senator Werthebach blurted out the real reasons for banning the demonstration. On April 24 the *Tagesspiegel* newspaper reported: “Werthebach said that the fall of the Berlin Wall, German reunification and the move of the government from Bonn to Berlin were facts which disallowed any ‘lawlessness’ in Berlin. He could not understand for what ends ‘left-wing extremists’ sought to fight for. The ‘extreme left-wing block’ of the Warsaw Pact has collapsed. According to Werthebach: ‘They are conducting a struggle against those who rule. That is no longer acceptable’.”

The SPD—the coalition partner of the CDU in Berlin's city council—have unanimously supported the ban. The Green Party also welcomed the ban, although expressing at the same time its fears that the ban could lead to protests taking place outside of police control.



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