

German authorities suspend right to demonstrate outside Munich Security Conference

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In order to make clear that German militarism is not restricted to the suppression of peoples of foreign countries but also will be used at home, all demonstrations directed against the 38th Munich Security Conference last weekend were banned. A massive police presence was used to suppress even the most peaceful of protests and criminalise numerous young demonstrators.

In the run-up to the conference, a range of varied groups had issued calls for demonstrations and meetings. Many came from groups associated with the Church, pacifism and anti-racism.

Munich city authorities, led by Mayor Christian Ude (SPD), proceeded to ban all demonstrations in the city and the ban was subsequently confirmed by a succession of courts in the state of Bayern. In justifying the action, both the city administration and the courts uncritically cited claims by German intelligence sources that “3,000 potentially violent ‘autonomes’ (anarchists)” were on the way, intent on “disrupting” Munich’s city centre.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* commented: “Overnight—namely from Thursday to Friday—an apparent 300 potentially violent demonstrators on the way to Munich turned into 3,000. Nobody is completely sure how this came about, but it was nevertheless the reason for imposing a sort of quarantine of fundamental rights over the entire city for a period of three days: no demos, no banners, no whistling.”

In addition, Mayor Ude threatened “consequences” for city-sponsored institutions and organisations which afforded any sort of logistical assistance to the demonstrators. The city’s Culture Department had

previously banned two meetings planned by opponents of the security conference to be held in the city’s “One World House”. At an information meeting on January 17, it was claimed, leaflets had been distributed calling for disruption of the conference.

Prior to the conference, on Thursday and Friday, police took four people into custody, including a press speaker for the “Alliance against the NATO Security Conference”, Hans-Georg Eberl. A group of 13 persons who took to the streets in a silent protest were stopped by police and subjected to police control.

Later, Claus Schreer, the organiser of the “Alliance against the Nato Security Conference”, was arrested and held in police custody until the end of the Munich conference on Sunday afternoon. A police speaker explained that the purpose of the arrest was “to prevent the two men organising a fresh demonstration and thereby violating the ban on demonstrations.”

A total of 3,500 police, drawn from across Germany, used barricades, water-throwers and armoured bulldozers to seal off a wide area around the conference centre. Helicopters flew non-stop over the city centre and a virtual state of emergency existed in the city.

Despite the ban on demonstrations, many NATO opponents took to the streets. At a demonstration of around 2,000 on Friday evening, 300 were taken into custody and 29 arrested. According to the organisers of the meeting, police employed truncheons and pepper spray in the course of their intervention. The head of the ambulance services recorded eight injured demonstrators. Despite all the warnings of “violent disturbances” not a single police officer was injured while, according to a report in the *Tageszeitung*, a 70-year-old female demonstrator was handled so

aggressively she had to be hospitalised.

By Saturday afternoon 6,000 to 7,000 demonstrators had gathered in the city centre. Police also violently intervened to disperse this demonstration and dislodge sit-down protesters. To begin with, police formed a ring around the demonstrators and as individuals broke free from the ring, police reformed to blockade participants. As evening came police then took many demonstrators into custody.

According to the *Junge Welt* newspaper, over a period of six hours police forcibly contained hundreds of people seeking to attend an officially approved meeting organised by the Alliance against the NATO Conference to be held in the Munich trade union headquarters. The group trying to attend the meeting were later transported to prisoner collection points. In the meantime, special units of the Brandenburg police sealed off the trade union building. Nobody was allowed to enter or leave the premises. Police then demanded that meeting participants already inside the building leave, one at a time, and allow themselves to be controlled by the police.

According to official figures, a total of 849 demonstrators were arrested in the area surrounding the security conference; 57 were charged and presented to investigating judges for “causing bodily harm, breach of the peace or resisting police officers”. In many cases the least protest against the forcible breaking up of small groups of demonstrators, or any attempt to articulate a political opinion, was sufficient excuse to merit such a charge. In addition, police controlled the personal papers of numerous “suspects”, i.e., youth looking like potential demonstrators. This data was then transferred into police computers.

Instead of the alleged “3,000 anarchists”, a police spokesman reported that just 200 had made their way to the conference. Nevertheless, according to the spokesman, the total ban on demonstrations was “correct and important”. He was not prepared to answer questions regarding the excessive violence employed by individual officers in the course of the police operation.

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