

German government clamps down on opposition prior to Bush visit

Stefan Steinberg
21 May 2002

A total of 10,000 police are being mobilised for the one-day visit to Berlin, Germany planned by US President George W. Bush this week. In addition to a full mobilisation of the Berlin police force, extra contingents of police are being drawn from other states in the east and west of the country.

Following violent clashes between police and demonstrators at May Day demonstrations in Berlin, the city's interior minister, Erhart Körting (SPD), has repeatedly stressed that the full force of the state will be employed to prevent any possible disruption to the Bush visit. Körting is seeking to follow the example of Bayern police forces who intervened brutally against demonstrators protesting the NATO summit in Munich at the end of January this year.

At the same time, considerable political pressure is being applied by Germany's SPD (Social Democratic Party)-Green Party coalition government to intimidate political opposition to Bush.

Bush is due to arrive in Berlin on Wednesday, May 22 and will stay just 24 hours in Germany before flying on further to Moscow for talks with President Vladimir Putin. In Berlin, Bush plans to give a speech to the German parliament. The main topics of discussion during his trip will be the international situation, particularly developments in the Middle East.

A range of political organisations and peace groups have called for a series of demonstrations this Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday to protest the Bush visit and especially draw attention to his government's aggressive military activities in Afghanistan as well as plans for war against Iraq.

The huge German police presence on the streets of Berlin will be supplemented by a small army of American secret service agents, anti-terror units and snipers flown in prior to the Bush visit. The dominating

presence of the American agents in the Bush security operation has already led to tensions between the various national police agencies, with one German paper commenting: "Germany is not Egypt, even less a banana republic." Germany "was able to deal with its own Red Army Fraction terrorists" in the 1970s and '80s, therefore the message is "co-operation with the Bush security experts, yes. Humiliation by the Yankees no" (*Welt am Sonntag*).

In line with the massive police presence, large areas of the center of Berlin are to be sealed off during the Bush trip to ensure that demonstrators do not even come within shouting distance of the American president. A planned route for one of the demonstrations due to march past the German Foreign Ministry was forbidden at the last moment by police authorities and the marchers will be restricted to a route remote from all government buildings. In addition, one of Berlin's leading universities, the Humboldt, situated over a mile away from the German parliament building in the middle of the city, has refused to make rooms available to groups wishing to hold protest meetings on the campus.

Despite the huge security operations, police representatives and politicians from the opposition Christian Democratic Union (CDU) are insisting on even tighter measures. One of the German police trade unions has called for a ban on all "left-wing demonstrators" and the police trade union, together with prominent CDU representatives, has demanded that, for the first time in Germany, police be issued rubber bullets to deal with demonstrators.

In addition to organising the capital's biggest ever police mobilisation, Germany's SPD-Green government has also warned its own deputies and party organisations not to take part in any activities directed

at the American president. During demonstrations in the 1980s to protest the visit by former US president Ronald Reagan to Berlin, prominent members of both the SPD, and in particular the Green Party, took to the streets. Now Green Party Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer has explicitly warned all deputies and Green local organisations to have nothing to do with the current demonstrations.

Pressure has also been exerted to ensure that members of the Berlin state government, consisting of a coalition between the SPD and PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism—formerly the East German Stalinist SED), also remain at their desks during the Bush visit. SPD Mayor Klaus Wowereit was forced to call off a planned trip to Australia at short notice in order to be in the city when Bush arrives and Wowereit's deputy Gregor Gysi (PDS) has declared that other pressing engagements will prevent him from joining delegations from the PDS who will take part in the demonstrations against Bush.

Leading members of the German government are well aware that tensions between the US and Germany have grown steadily following American military activities since September 11. In the latest issue of *Der Spiegel* magazine, Foreign Minister Fischer is quoted as being “deeply shocked” at the dismissive attitude exhibited by the US government towards the NATO alliance. Following a recent visit to the US, Fischer informed German cabinet colleagues that in the course of his trip and in discussions with American politicians “anti-European sentiments were widespread.” In the run-up to the Bush visit, however, the main priority for Fischer and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder has been to ensure that such differences are aired and fought out in constitutional channels and not made an issue for genuine public debate.

The other important factor in the aggressive police and military preparations under way for the Bush visit is the increasing turn by all German political parties to the issue of domestic security and law and order. Following the media and political debate after the recent mass shooting by a student at an East German school, and against a background of recent victories for right-wing parties in European elections, all of the German political parties have undertaken a noticeable and rapid lurch to the right. Suddenly law and order has become one of the most pressing themes in the

campaign for the upcoming German national elections, with all parties intent on demonstrating that they are best qualified to build up police and state forces to tackle “crime and terrorism.”

It is against this backdrop that the German national and state governments are taking unprecedented measures to clamp down on opposition prior to the Bush visit.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact