

Thousands march in Germany to protest US-Israeli war against Lebanon

Our correspondents
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Demonstrations and rallies against Israeli aggression and war crimes in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories took place Saturday in a number of German cities, including Berlin, Cologne and Frankfurt. August 12 was an international day of protest, marked as well by rallies in the US, Australia, Britain and South America.

The largest German demonstration took place in Berlin, where an estimated 6,000 people marched through the centre of the city for a rally in Potsdam Square. The demonstrators, including many youth and entire families, denounced the brutal bombardment and persecution of Lebanese and Palestinian civilians in the course of the month-long Israeli military offensive.

Prior to the rally on Saturday, the Berlin state interior minister Erhard Körting issued instructions that no demonstration of sympathy for Hezbollah, the Lebanese nationalist movement, could be displayed at the protest. Körting's action, banning support for an organisation that has not been proscribed in Germany, represents a blatant violation of the principle of free speech and is entirely in keeping with the German political establishment's support for the Israeli-US war.

Intent on censoring any criticism of Israel, Körting's police put theory into practice on Saturday and brutally moved against a handful of participants. Police units were obvious throughout the demonstration and as protesters gathered at the Berlin City Hall for the start of the protest, dozens of police moved in to restrain and arrest a handful of protesters who had briefly displayed a Hezbollah banner.

As has been the case on previous antiwar demonstrations over the past few weeks, the August 12 protest in Berlin was striking for the absence of left political parties and trade unions although one of the leaders of the Left Party- Party of Democratic

Socialism, Oscar Lafontaine, had declared his readiness last week to speak at the closing rally on Saturday.

Prior to the demonstration, however, the Left Party-PDS organization in Berlin declared it would not support the anti-war protest or urge its members to take part. Unwilling to challenge the stance taken by the PDS in Berlin Lafontaine did not speak at the rally Saturday and no delegation from Left Party-PDS took part on the demonstration.

A similar stance was adopted by Verdi, the public service employees union. While the union's district organization declared its readiness to support the demonstration, Verdi's state organisation stated its opposition on the grounds that the call for the protest did not expressly include the right of existence of the state of Israel. As a result, no trade union banners were to be seen on the demonstration.

Members of the German Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit-PSG) distributed thousands of copies of a leaflet denouncing the ban on free speech launched by the Berlin state interior minister.

At the rally that closed the demonstration a member of the Left Party-PDS, Wolfgang Gehrcke, addressed the assembled marchers, but made no reference to his party's refusal to support the rally. Instead Gehrcke spoke on behalf of a delegation of European "lefts" who had recently visited Lebanon.

While banners on the demonstration indicted the German government for its support for the US-Israeli war and its share in the responsibility for the loss of life in Lebanon, Gehrcke said nothing about the Merkel regime's support for the aggression and restricted his criticism to its delivery of weapons to the Israeli government. Nor did he make any criticism of the latest UN resolution. Instead Gehrcke pleaded vaguely for an

end to hatred and for “good neighbourly relations” in the region.

WSWS reporters at the Berlin rally interviewed a number of participants, including Ali Sleiman Machoun. Ali lived in Sweden for 20 years, before moving to Germany five years ago.

“My father, my mother, my entire family live in Beirut, but I have no news from them during the last few weeks and I am very worried. I have tried telephoning, but the communications network no longer functions. The current war is barbaric and has to be stopped. I hate the blood and the loss of lives, of children’s lives, which I see on television.

“I recall when I lived in Beirut as a child. My mother used to send me to the Jewish baker in our neighbourhood to get bread—at that time we all lived together in harmony, Muslims, Christians and Jews. Now look at the situation—everybody is at one another’s throats. And in Iraq, the Sunnis against the Shia.

“At the back of the Israeli offensive is America. I belong to a generation that once had great respect for America. I was an admirer of John F. Kennedy; I even cried when he died. But the current regime in Washington has nothing in common with the American past. They are just warmongers and thieves.

“First they raped Iraq, now they have given the green light for Israel’s invasion of Lebanon and next they plan to attack Syria and Iran. I do not know how it will all end, but I am very fearful. I see the danger of a world conflagration arising from American and Israeli expansionism.”

An estimated 500 persons took part in a demonstration and rally against the Lebanon war in Frankfurt on Saturday. The demonstration was called by the Palestinian community in the state of Hesse, the “Solidarity with Lebanon” organisation and a number of other groups. As has been the case with previous demonstrations in Frankfurt, one of Germany’s largest cities, the organisers of the demonstration were met with a complete blackout by the press and other media.

The central demands of the demonstration were an “Immediate and unconditional ceasefire” and a “Halt to all deliveries of weapons to the region.” Other demands

included the withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied territories and immediate humanitarian aid.

Maurice Estephan, a representative of the Palestinian community in Hesse, declared that Israel had prepared its attack on Lebanon far in advance and with the support of the US. The war did not begin with the two kidnapped Israeli soldiers, he said. “For over 30 years Israel has been abducting Palestinians,” Estephan declared. “The latest victim is the chairman of the Palestinian parliament. During the past eight weeks Israel has abducted and arrested a third of the members of the Palestinian cabinet and 34 democratically elected mayors and deputies, including some who are not members of the Hamas organisation.”

Estephan stated that the real reason for the war was to “realise the dreams of neo-conservatives in the United States” who are seeking to establish American hegemony in the oil-rich region: “Israel is to play the role of the reliable policeman in the region and Hezbollah and Hamas are to be eliminated. This is the real reason for the killing and murder in Lebanon and in Palestine. The next countries on the list are Syria and Iran.”

The next speaker was Mathias Jochheim, chairman of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. He denounced the German government for violating its own guideline “that no weapons would be exported to countries guilty of violating human rights—but this is precisely the case with Israel. In addition the German guidelines forbid any delivery of weapons to areas where war or conflicts are taking place. This guideline is also being blatantly ignored by the German government.”

Germany is involved in major arms projects with the Israeli government, including the supply of armoured personnel carriers and submarines capable of carrying cruise missiles. Two thirds of the financing for the submarine project comes from the German government budget—“a thoroughly shameful enterprise,” according to Jochheim.



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