

Germany: Police use massive force against G8 demonstrators in Rostock

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A peaceful mass demonstration of an estimated 80,000 participants turned into a grim battle between thousands of heavily armed police and demonstrators—including provocative members of the “black bloc” of anarchists—on late Saturday afternoon in the northern German port city of Rostock.

The day began peacefully with tens of thousands gathering at two meeting points in Rostock for marches through the city and a final rally on the city’s dockside. The crowds of demonstrators—a large percentage of whom were in their teens or twenties—came from across Germany and many European countries to express their opposition to the G8 summit of world leaders, which takes place this week in the nearby holiday resort of Heiligendamm.

A broad mix of political and special interest groups sported a variety of banners with slogans denouncing world leaders and their policies. Cultural groups carried out colourful street performances in which figures like US President George Bush, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian leader Vladimir Putin were caricatured with huge masks.

The banners, slogans and speeches of the young participants at the initial rallies made clear that the overwhelming majority of the protesters expected little positive to come out of the summit. Calls were made for the creation of a “global movement from below” to oppose capitalism and its leaders. At around 1 p.m., the demonstrators began their march through the city.

On the outskirts of the demonstration, it was clear that at the same time a massive police operation was being set into motion. Most of the city centre’s streets had been closed and were available only to continuous convoys of police vans transporting heavily garbed police from one part of the city to the other. Large units of armed police were also on the move by foot to occupy and reinforce strategic parts of the city along the route of the demonstration. Police units had been imported from as far away as the southern state of Bavaria to assist in the police operation.

The intimidating climate created by huge numbers of police was not merely directed at protesters. This reporter stood upon a public bridge with 40 other journalists and photographers seeking to take pictures of the march as it moved along its route.

Before the march arrived, a large contingent of police proceeded to attempt to physically force all of the journalists from the bridge, pushing and shoving the young men and women.

Only after protesting their right to press freedom and resisting the bullying tactics of the police was the group of journalists allowed to remain on the bridge. At the same time, a police

photographer provocatively took video pictures of all those on the bridge.

As the main march arrived at its destination nearing 4 p.m., an announcement was made from one of the speaker vans accompanying the demonstration that police were preparing to move in amongst marchers. A group of youth began running away from the march to avoid a confrontation but were then chased by police. Some masked demonstrators then threw rocks and bottles at the police lines. The situation escalated rapidly, with huge numbers of police reinforcements moving in to charge at and battle with protesters.

A police helicopter, which had hovered overhead for the entire period of the demonstration, then flew demonstrably low over the large stage that had been set up for the final rally. Speakers from the stage appealing for calm could hardly be heard over the noise of the helicopter, and it was impossible to continue with the planned programme of speakers and music. Police tactics intensified as frustration grew and water cannon were employed to spray demonstrators and clear the main road alongside the dock area.

As a result of the street battles, which went on into the evening, a total of 520 demonstrators were injured with 20 severely injured. An estimated 165 protesters were arrested, and police also claimed many casualties.

The Republican Union of Attorneys (RAV) condemned the brutal actions of the police in Rostock, which it claimed were responsible for escalating the fighting and subsequent injuries. The RAV listed examples of medical aid orderlies who were physically prevented by police from assisting injured protesters. Attorneys attending the demonstration were prevented from giving legal assistance to demonstrators apprehended by police, and witnesses reported how police forced detained persons to their knees and restrained them in such a manner as to prevent them being able to communicate with other persons.

As was the case in the Italian city of Genoa in the anti-G8 protest in 2002, the so-called “black bloc” of anarchists played a thoroughly dubious role in the skirmishes and fighting in Rostock. In the course of the investigation into the death of a demonstrator in Genoa in 2002, it was revealed that the Italian police had infiltrated its agents into the “black bloc” and relied on such agents provocateurs to provide the spark that enabled the police to move in with a bloody and ruthless offensive.

It is well known that the German intelligence service has also

stepped up its infiltration of such anarchist groups in the run-up to the G8 summit. In its edition of May 14, *Der Spiegel* magazine reported that the BND had made the observation and infiltration of anti-globalisation groups a central emphasis of its work: "All preparatory meetings are subject to surveillance and those groups involved infiltrated by undercover agents."

In fact, the massive police operation in Rostock is entirely in line with the offensive against democratic rights undertaken by the German coalition government in preparation for the summit. In the week before the Rostock demonstration, a German court confirmed an application by state police for a ban on all demonstrations within a radius of 10 kilometres of the summit meeting place. This means that a 40-square-kilometre protective zone has been established around the 12-kilometre barbed wire high-security fence protecting the G8 leaders in the luxury holiday resort of Heiligendamm.

Other unprecedented measures against press freedom in Germany include a ban on 20 accredited journalists from attending the summit. The journalists are alleged to have written articles critical of the summit. In addition, those journalists who are allowed to attend have been told that "for security reasons" they cannot walk on the extensive grass gardens enclosing the main meeting centre and hotel.

Despite the provocative police tactics, a large team of WSWs supporters were able to distribute thousands of copies of the *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board statement: "The fight against war and social reaction requires a socialist strategy."

This reporter spoke with a number of demonstrators:

Owen Ford is an artist from Canada who has lived and worked for the past three years in the east German city of Dresden. I asked him why he was attending the demonstration in Rostock. "I think it is important to be counted," he said. "I attended the demonstrations in Genoa and Quebec and think it is important to voice one's opposition to developments that are taking place in capitalism as a whole. I have noted a different social climate here in Germany as opposed to the anti-globalisation demo in Quebec a few years ago. Here in Germany, there is a broader awareness that the source of problems is the capitalist system itself, and that this has to be replaced if we want to deal with the basics."

He did not expect much to come out of the summit: "Previous summits show that world leaders have failed abysmally. They have kept perhaps 2 percent of their promises. With regard to Africa, I read the other day that there is a transfer of \$800 billion from Africa to the advanced industrial countries. This is after all the sanctimonious words at various summits about combating poverty on the continent."

When asked about the US political system and the role of the Democratic Party, Owen answered: "The American political system is totally corrupt—the extent of the corruption is demonstrated by the fact that someone like George Bush could get to the top and the Democratic Party represents absolutely no alternative. With regard to political choice in America, it's like Henry Ford said: 'You can have whichever car you want as long as it's black.'"

"Here in Europe, I have noted a different form of solidarity amongst ordinary people compared to Canada and America. I

believe that it is bound up with the elements of the social welfare state that still exist and the traces of solidarity in former East Germany that go back to the old system, although that was completely distorted by the Stalinist bureaucracy. It is disturbing now to see the rise of right-wing politicians such as Blair, Merkel and Sarkozy who are intent on doing away with what remains of the European social state. At the same time you can see how things are becoming tougher for immigrants with the development of the Fortress Europe.

"I read the WSWs web site every day and rely on it for my basic political orientation. The attention to art and culture on the web site is very important. A progressive political alternative has to have a progressive cultural policy. As an artist, I am aware on a daily basis of the problems confronting genuine artists. The current art market has been thoroughly debased by huge amounts of money."

Elke and Hasso from Baden-Württemberg attended the demonstration to show their opposition to the politics of the leaders taking part in the G8 summit. Elke said, "It is completely wrong that eight states and heads of state seek to dictate their will over the rest of the world. I think the most important questions that need to be addressed are the problem of poverty of the third world, the dangers to the climate and the issue of militarism. At the same time, I am convinced nothing will happen at the summit that will bring about anything positive.

"I am also completely opposed to the military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. The German troops should be withdrawn immediately. Their presence has nothing to do with humanitarian aid but more to do with the German government and economy. My husband and I are members of the Election Alternative group (WASG) in Baden-Württemberg, and we voted for the merger to form the Left Party. But at the same time, we are very opposed to the social cuts that have been carried out by the Left Party in Berlin. We must ensure that just because the new party has been formed it does not mean the controversy over these issues will stop. It is not possible to base an alternative on the sorts of policies being carried out in Berlin."

The Left Party-Social Democratic Party Senate in Berlin has carried out the most savage range of welfare, job and wage cuts of any German state administration in modern times.



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