

Anti-G8 demonstration violence in Rostock: questions and contradictions

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The acts of violence that occurred during the mass demonstration against the G8 summit last Saturday in Rostock have led to noisy appeals from the German political and media establishment for tougher police measures. Many commentators have chosen to blame the mass of demonstrators and the organisers of the protest for the excesses, and then sought retroactively to justify the attacks on the right to demonstrate and freedom of assembly that preceded the demonstration.

Reinhard Mohr writes in *Spiegel-Online* that, as far as he is concerned, the demonstrators as a group were responsible for the riots because they did not distinguish themselves clearly enough from violent anarchist elements (so-called “autonomes”). Anyone who labels the elected heads of government and other G8 summit participants “gangsters and criminals” should not be surprised at the outbreak of violence, Mohr concludes. The author began his journalistic career as an editor of the Frankfurt anarchist pamphlet “Pavement Beach,” which justified the street battles fought in the 1970s by his colleagues Joschka Fischer and Daniel Cohn-Bendit.

Michael Bauchmüller from the *Süddeutschen Zeitung* draws a link between the burning of cars and masked stone-throwers and a political perspective that questions the existing social order. “All those, however, who together with the G8 want to consign the whole system to history [...] should remain at home for the next few days. They are the bearers of discord in a world that is struggling for a better future.”

While the photos of street battles and reports of a thousand injured, including 430 policemen (it turns out that of the reported total of 400 injured and 30 severely injured policemen just two visited a hospital and these two were not so badly injured that they had to be kept in overnight), are being eagerly used to criminalise any fundamental criticism of capitalism, there is a decided lack of interest on the part of politicians and the media in determining precisely what took place in Rostock.

In fact, the demonstration began peacefully and proceeded for many hours before marchers arrived at the final rallying place at the city’s docks. At this point the protest had a decidedly festive character with theatre and cultural groups at the forefront. Demonstrators and organisers were shocked by the sudden outbreak of violence, with participants making a number of attempts to pacify both the stone throwers and the police.

In addition, it should be borne in mind that hard-liners in the German interior ministry—in particular Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democratic Union-CDU)—had announced the probability of outbreaks of violence weeks before, and then on the evening of the demonstration, with news stations showing burning cars and road barricades, called for a further arming of the police. Meanwhile CDU politicians are proposing the deployment of the notorious anti-terror GSG9 commando force at demonstrations and the equipping of police with rubber bullets. The next step can be predicted: a call from Schäuble for the use of the German army to suppress domestic opposition.

If, however, one begins considering the Rostock events by posing the

question, “Who benefited from the riots?” then it is clear that the demonstrators lose out on all fronts. The interior ministry, on the other hand, is using the riots to justify both those attacks already carried out against freedom of assembly (as well as the assault carried out against left-wing organizations and globalization opponents, whose offices and dwellings were raided in the middle of May) and to prepare new and even more far-reaching attacks and police measures.

In this respect it is necessary to examine a number of obvious contradictions in the behaviour of the police and the security forces.

How is one to account for the fact that the police had warned weeks before of “autonomous rioters,” but then allowed a closed formation of “black bloc” anarchists to parade unmonitored on one of the two demonstrations? Why wasn’t this “black bloc” accompanied by experienced police units, as is usually the case? Why was a police vehicle then parked provocatively in the middle of the area leading up to the final rallying point? According to several eye-witness reports, the attacks carried out by some members of the “black bloc” on this vehicle were the trigger for the intervention by police. Why was no attention paid to repeated calls by the organisers of the rally for the removal of the vehicle by the large numbers of police escorting the demonstration?

Who gave the order to obstruct photo journalists from taking pictures during the peaceful phase of the demonstration? Why were the authorities so keen that photos not be taken?

It is well-known that at the start of the year the German authorities intensified the infiltration of undercover agents into the “violent autonomous movement.” In its May 14 edition, *Der Spiegel* magazine wrote, “At the beginning of the year the Federal Intelligence Service (BND) declared globalization critics to be an ‘operational focal point.’ All preparatory meetings are observed, the groups involved are infiltrated” by undercover agents.

Just one week before the demonstration, on 29 May, the *Bild* newspaper reported on “secret police plans” in preparation for the G8 summit. According to *Bild*, the first point of a three-point plan reads, “Undercover agents who were infiltrated a long time ago by the intelligence services are to provide early evidence of planned disruptive actions.”

The question therefore arises: how many undercover agents were operating in the “black bloc”? What information about acts of violence were communicated to the police command by these undercover agents, and why was nothing undertaken to prevent these acts of violence? Moreover, were undercover agents involved in the outbreak of violence, and to what extent?

These are urgent questions that need to be investigated. In view of the large number of casualties, it is necessary to clarify the role played by undercover agents. Until this information is made available, it is impossible to rule out the use of undercover agents as *agents provocateurs* on the demonstration.

The events of the G8 summit in Genoa in June 2001 took place just a few years ago and are still fresh in the memory. During the course of the

protest, young demonstrator Carlo Giuliani (23) was killed. His family and other victims of police violence fought for years to clarify the circumstances leading up to his death. Finally, the Italian public prosecutor's office declared that the violence at the Genoa demonstration had been initiated by a hard core of approximately 200 persons, a considerable number of whom were either undercover policemen or right-wing extremists hired by the police. The provocateurs discussed their tactics with police, disguised themselves as anarchists and mixed with peaceful demonstrators before undertaking their criminal operations.

While the rioters were left largely undisturbed, their violence in Genoa became the pretext for the police to move with extreme brutality against the rest of the demonstrators. A good deal of evidence has emerged about the police provocation. There are numerous reports of the use of massive force on their part. Giuliani was shot by a cop. At the same time a particularly savage assault took place on the Pascoli school, where hundreds of demonstrators were surprised in their sleep and savagely beaten. Afterwards a number had to receive treatment in intensive care units.

The pretexts given by Italian police to justify its raid on the school were completely disproved by the public prosecutor's office. Police even brought along their own Molotov cocktails to plant on the young people sleeping at the school.

Anyone who believes that similar things could not happen in Germany is simply ignorant of history.

At the end of the 1960s the undercover agent Peter Urbach supplied bombs and weapons to members of the Berlin APO (Extra-Parliamentary Opposition), which later constituted one of the initial elements of the Red Army Faction (RAF). Ten years later a member of the BND blew a hole in the wall of the prison in the town of Celle in an attempt to stage a prison outbreak by RAF member Sigurd Debus and thereby enable the police to infiltrate the organization.

There have been numerous reports in Germany of the use of police provocateurs in more recent years. In May 1993 when East German miners from Bischofferode protested in front of government buildings to oppose the closure of their pit, policemen garbed as anarchists smuggled themselves into the demonstration and then threw bottles and stones at their colleagues in uniform. When some workers intervened to stop the rioters and hand them over to the police, the latter showed a complete lack of interest. Instead the police officers arbitrarily seized a number of workers and beat them brutally.

There have also been a number of reports of the role of deliberate police provocations in connection with the Gorleben anti-nuclear protests.

In this connection it is necessary to take eye-witness reports by demonstrators in Rostock very seriously. On the *Indymedia* web site, a number of demonstrators have described their experiences. Almost all of the reports stress that for most of the day the demonstration had proceeded in a very calm and peaceful manner. At the same time, several demonstrators observed—independently of each other—that some members of the “black bloc” functioned independently of the main body of anarchists and seemed to be in contact with the police.

Thus Rainer Zwanzleitner reports on *Indymedia*, “We were part of the demo, which came from the direction of Hamburg Street, quite near the front. When we reached the city's docks we observed how a group of police (approx. 10-20) positioned in front of a building site fence began, as if by command, to calmly commence putting on their helmets, i.e. to prepare for action. There had been no incidents up until that point.”

Fearful of a police intervention, Zwanzleitner removed himself with his group from this police cordon and continued to move towards the stage set up for the planned final rally. “From there we could observe that the police had set off towards the head of the demo point. At about the same time several police units from the direction of the city centre piled into the demonstration, which had come from the railway station.” The final rally

had already begun and after approximately 10 to 15 minutes a member of the organising committee appealed by microphone for the police to withdraw and desist with their provocative deployments.

Instead the opposite took place. A police helicopter circled directly over the stage and flew so low that its noise dominated the entire area near the public-address system, making communication from the stage impossible.

“When it became calmer we left the site of the rally at the docks and proceeded towards the pedestrian zone. What we saw on the way was nothing less than a police camp. There were police vehicles everywhere.” Meanwhile another threatening situation was brewing at the university square.

“A group of perhaps between 20 and 30 demonstrators dressed in black entered the square followed by police units. Some of these demonstrators remained at the square, some continued on to the city hall. Then we saw another 3 or 4 figures dressed in black, who differed considerably, however, from the usual picture of an ‘autonome’: They were notably broadly built, identically dressed (thin nylon anoraks, identical trousers and their faces were masked). Under the thin clothing it was possible to identify body armour. And even more remarkably: they left the square, fully masked, in the opposite direction to the others, i.e. directly towards the police, who were moving in. We were then unable to ascertain where they went to next.” (<http://de.indymedia.org/2007/06/180968.shtml>)

Other participants on the demonstration report that they noticed that members of the “black bloc” brusquely rejected political material in the form of leaflets and flyers. “This is new for me with regard to the autonomous left ... I had the impression that something was not right with these people, they did not appear to behave like lefts, nor like left anarchists,” was the report by a participant, Anna U.

It is not only demonstrators who have criticized the provocative behaviour of the police. In *Deutschlandradio Kultur* Munich police psychologist George Sieber described the actions taken by police in Rostock as “operational stupidity.” The police were following outdated tactics and reacted with disproportionate force, Sieber said.

When asked how the violence came about, he answered, “It was like this: an escalation had already taken place, long before it really heated up in Rostock. What everybody could see was how police officers appeared with very unusual body armour, at first glance one might have confused them with marines in Iraq.”

When asked by a reporter whether he thought the escalation had been caused by the police, Sieber said the escalation had already taken place: “They proceeded on the basis of extreme danger or actually felt such a danger, and then resorted to security precautions that represented a severe violation of human rights. This is what I call escalation—that was in fact the highest level of escalation.”

The demonstration was initially peaceful. “We had two observers on the spot, who notified us by telephone, ‘there is an atmosphere here which resembles the Love Parade [an annual musical event in Berlin],’” Sieber reported. “Things first really got going when a police car was damaged and then a great deal happened, which one would describe as disproportionate reaction on the part of police officers.”

Sieber criticized the fact that the security forces had proceeded almost exclusively “in fixed formation.” Such deployments, “in fixed formation, in the form of a chain, as a combat patrol,” are completely outdated and have been described since “approximately the 1970s as simply operational stupidity.” In Rostock “everything actually took place in opposition to what is taught in the textbook. And the officials naturally learn at the police academy that one should not do it such a way.” Therefore “this deployment was from the start completely inappropriate.”

Following repeated demands by the surprised reporter, who asked whether he was really accusing the police command, Sieber replied, “No, this is not a reproach; it is possibly even what was politically intended.”

This is precisely the question: Were events set in motion with the

knowledge that photos of burning autos and stone-throwing rioters could be used to justify the attacks on the right to demonstrate that had already taken place and to prepare for a new assault on democratic rights? Was this what was “politically intended”?

An investigation is necessary to determine whether the riots were the result of a planned manoeuvre, in which undercover police operated as agents provocateurs in the “black bloc,” while the police reacted with closed formations and the police command prepared to carry out a deployment which resulted in several hundred injured demonstrators.

We appeal to readers who took part in the demonstration and possess any important information about what took place to send us their material and establish contact with the editorial board.



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