

Germany: Neo-Nazis attack May Day demonstration in Dortmund

Our correspondent
9 May 2009

Approximately 300 neo-Nazis attacked a demonstration organised by the DGB, the German trade union federation, on May 1 as it set off from the square in front of the old synagogue towards Westphalia Park.

Approximately 40 right-wingers had turned up at the main railway station at 9 o'clock, where they then waited for others to arrive who were travelling by bus. They told police officers present that they wanted to go to Siegen, about 100 kilometres southeast of Dortmund, where a right-wing demonstration had been authorised.

However, the police officers seemed more worried about approximately 30 anti-fascist activists who wanted to demonstrate against the Nazis.

The main police presence was in Siegen, while only a small force had remained in Dortmund, although prior to May 1 several right-wing web sites had called for "creative" and "decentralised actions" and for their supporters to "visit other demos" (clearly a reference to the DGB demonstration).

However, instead of travelling to Siegen by train, the mob of neo-Nazis, now grown to approximately 300, set off at 11 o'clock towards the DGB demonstration. Their numbers had been swelled by the arrival of two buses from Wartburg and one from Minden. The Dortmund DGB district chair, Eberhard Weber, who had been warned by the police, immediately gave the signal for the union demonstration to set off toward Westphalia Park, where the DGB's family fete takes place each May Day.

The neo-Nazis, however, used the urban transit system and were able to reach the DGB demonstration before it arrived at the park. Armed with sticks, firecrackers, stones and lumps of clay containing glass fragments the Nazi thugs attacked a contingent of Kurds and Turks at the rear of the demonstration, injuring several people, including some police officers. One demonstrator was said to have received serious injuries after being hit by a bullet-like projectile.

The DGB demonstrators attempted to defend themselves. The relatively few police officers present, who were poorly

equipped, tried to separate the two groups. Some of those on the DGB demonstration were treated with extreme brutality by the police, as is shown in photos published in the press and in one video, which clearly shows a prostrate Turkish demonstrator being kicked in the head by a policeman in full riot gear.

Eyewitnesses also report that those attacking the DGB demonstration included "SS-Siggi" (Siegfried Borchardt), an individual who has been convicted several times before and has been active in the Dortmund neo-Nazi scene since the 1970s.

The Dortmund police called for reinforcements from other cities in the Ruhr, but these arrived sometime later. According to police reports, officers used their batons against the aggressors and were finally able to push them back. Approximately 150 Nazis were detained near the pedestrian precinct, and another 40 were held near the Reinoldi Church. In addition, a section of the DGB demonstration was also held in a police "kettling," operation, surrounded by a line of police.

In contrast to the treatment previously meted out to anti-fascists in Dortmund, the police treated the detained neo-Nazis with reserve. Under police escort, they were allowed access to toilets, and minors and pregnant women were released. Those remaining were then gradually taken away to give their details to police. A total of some 280 right-wingers were arrested and face charges of breach of the peace.

A counter-demonstration later the same day was banned, with police threatening to declare an "emergency situation," leading the protesters to hold a meeting instead. However, anti-Nazi demonstrators arriving to participate were prevented from joining the meeting.

The head of the Dortmund Social Democratic Party (SPD), Franz Josef Drabig, witnessed the attack on the DGB demonstration and said: "I was angered by the brutality of the right-wing extremists. One cannot criticise the few police officers who were present. They were surprised by the attack. But I ask myself, how such a mob of Nazis could

remain unnoticed under the eyes of the police and secret service.” The Dortmund DGB district chair Weber also deplored the lack of a police presence: “The situation was unique. The region has a massive problem with violent neo-Nazis. A question that has to be asked is how the state’s forces of protection are set up in Dortmund.”

A question that should indeed be asked. Considering the fact that there are many undercover agents active inside the far-right, it is strange that there was apparently no prior knowledge of what was going to transpire. It is simply not credible that the Nazis were able to lead the police and secret service on such a wild goose chase, particularly since they have been trying to make Dortmund and the Ruhr area a centre of their activities for some years.

Recently, the secret service in North Rhine-Westphalia had warned that some nationalist groups in the Dortmund region were prone to extreme militancy, also modelling themselves (at least in appearance) on so-called “left” Autonome (anarchists). The question arises whether it was simply accepted that there was going to be an escalation of right-wing violence.

The Dortmund events are not an isolated case. In several German cities this year, neo-Nazis have stepped up their attempts to exploit May 1 for their own propaganda purposes. In the cities of Ulm, Rotenburg, Mainz and Berlin, there have been violent clashes between police and opponents of the far-right.

In view of the growth of the activities of the “Autonome Nationalisten,” it is difficult to establish the extent to which the Nazis, or the undercover agents in their ranks, had a hand in the so-called “left-wing riots” in Berlin and Hamburg.

Following May Day this year, the establishment parties and the media have been calling loudly for state intervention to be stepped up and for parties and demonstrations to be banned. The Dortmund police chief, Hans Schulze, said that in light of the right-wing attack on the DGB demo, a “re-evaluation of Nazi demos” would have to be conducted and they may well be banned. Until now, the Supreme Court has always given priority to the freedom of assembly, and in only a few cases have Nazi marches been banned.

In this regard, it is important to look at the reasons given for the banning of the central Nazi demonstration in Hanover. The Lower Saxony Administrative Court regarded it as sufficient grounds to prohibit the planned demonstration to cite the expected high numbers of participants of so-called Autonome Nationalisten, and that this would lead to violence on the demonstration. Moreover, the court ruled that even if the right-wing demonstration ran peacefully, it was to be expected that there would be a violent counter-demonstration, which could entail the police having to declare an “emergency situation.”

Such reasons could easily be used in future by the authorities to ban nearly any meeting or demonstration, and to completely abrogate the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and assembly.

In Dortmund, it did not even take a judge to ban the counter-demonstration against the Nazis. It was sufficient that the police declared they faced a “policing emergency,” a decision that was not justified by the level of reinforcements that then materialised.

The reactions to the violent events on May 1 by the political and trade union elite and the media, regardless whether these events stemmed from misguided young “left” Autonome or Nazis, and the calls for the state to be strengthened, must be taken very seriously. The motives for such a campaign are obvious when one reads the press reports about “right- and left-wing violence” on May 1 this year and repeated warnings of some politicians and trade unionists about the danger of “social unrest” because of the intensifying economic situation.

A cry of indignation went through the media when the SPD’s presidential candidate, Gesine Schwann, and DGB leader Michael Sommer dared to warn about the anger and danger of unrest in the general population in view of the financial and economic crisis and the attempts to resolve this on the backs of ordinary working people. This shows that ruling circles are very conscious of the explosiveness of the situation. They clearly see the necessity to sharpen the means of repression in order to defend their system and suppress the justified resistance of working people. The actions of the neo-Nazis supply them with a welcome pretext.



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