

# SPD in Berlin appoints hardliner as new police chief

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On June 30 the Berlin Senate, consisting of a coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Left Party, appointed the former head of the presidium of the Eastern Federal Border Police (BGS), Udo Hansen, as the city's new police chief.

Hansen is himself a member of the SPD and is regarded as a hard-liner in law enforcement circles. For several years he was a member of the GSG 9 special tactical unit. At the end of the 1990s he headed the border police at Frankfurt airport and was responsible for the transit area where refugees arriving by plane were detained pending deportation.

This procedure for rapid deportation was introduced by the conservative government headed by Helmut Kohl (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) and continued by the SPD-Green government led by Gerhard Schröder (SPD).

Hansen's first act as head of the transit area was to ensure the installation of fences and NATO barbed wire to prevent any possibility of escape on the part of asylum-seekers. In 1998 the press reported that, under Hansen's leadership, BGS officers had used teargas against refugees.

Nationwide headlines then reported on the case of 30-year-old Sudanese refugee Aamir Ageeb, who died on a Lufthansa plane on May 28, 1999 in the course of his forced deportation. Three officials from Hansen's BGS unit had pressed the head of the handcuffed man into his lap until he suffocated.

Five years after the violent death of Aamir Ageeb, the three officers involved in the assault were convicted, but received extremely light sentences and none went to prison. The presiding judge at the Frankfurt court, Heinrich Gehrke, explained his decision by pointing out that the main responsibility for the death rested with supervisors, including BGS officers who had since

been promoted.

In court Gehrke declared, "Abu Ghraib says hello!" directing his comment at Udo Hansen, who had testified as a witness in the trial and by that time had been promoted to the post of head of the BGS-East.

Another case at Frankfurt airport involving Udo Hansen's police hit the headlines, but resulted in no legal repercussions: the suicide of 40-year-old Algerian Naimah H., who hanged himself in a shower room in May 2000 after being held captive for seven months in the transit area.

In 2008 Hansen headed the presidium of the BGS and controlled approximately 9,000 police officers in Berlin, Brandenburg and Saxony. Once again during this period his main concern was establishing a harsh regime aimed at deterring refugees.

After the reorganization of the federal police in 2008 Hansen took temporary retirement following differences with Federal Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble. At the time he took a temporary job as security consultant for the European defense group EADS in Saudi Arabia.

The fact that Interior Minister Ehrhart Körting has appointed Hansen as chief of police in Berlin prior to the Senate election in September makes clear that the SPD is systematically preparing for an escalation of social conflict. When the former Berlin police chief, Hagen Saberschinsky, left office 10 years ago the Senate refused to appoint Hansen as a replacement. Hansen had been transferred to Berlin following the scandal in Frankfurt.

Now, following 10 years of rule by the SPD and the Left Party, social conditions in the German capital have worsened to such an extent that social protests could break out at any time. Bitterness over the anti-social policies of the Senate and growing inequality in the city

is widespread among broad layers of the population.

The appointment of Hansen indicates that the SPD leadership is preparing to respond to intensifying social tensions with increased state force. In this respect, the SPD remains loyal to the tradition of the first social democratic police minister, Gustav Noske, who in 1918-19 crushed the November workers revolution, and the Berlin police president, Karl Friedrich Zörgiebel, who in 1929, authorized the shooting down of dozens of workers in the notorious “Bloody May” incident.

The reaction of the Left Party is also revealing. The party took power in a coalition with the SPD in 2001 arguing it could pressure its partner to the left. Last Tuesday the party voted against the appointment of Hansen, well aware that its stance would have no effect because it had handed over the right of decision to the SPD prior to the vote. Their vote was based entirely on tactical considerations. The party is eager to polish up its “left” credentials before the vote in September.

In addition, the Left Party fears that a tougher line on the part of the Berlin police under Udo Hansen could provoke a social confrontation. The speaker of the Left Party fraction in the Senate, Udo Wolf, declared tamely that the appointment of Udo Hansen did not fit in with the image of a “citizen friendly local police”.

Other parties criticized the personnel decision for flimsy electoral reasons. The Greens, for example, declared that the appointment of Hansen revealed that the Senate was incompetent. At the same time, Green Party domestic affairs expert Benedikt Lux explained that Hansen would receive “a fair chance”. For Lux, Hansen was a “blank page”. Lux’s comment makes clear that asylum-seekers and immigrant workers can expect no improvement in their status should the Greens come to power in Berlin.



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