

Anti-war demonstrations in many German cities

Our correspondents
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A number of anti-war demonstrations took place across Germany at the weekend. Although a large majority of the population oppose a war with Syria attendance at the demonstrations was very small. This was due to the role of the so-called German peace movement and particularly the Left Party, which did all it could to limit the protests and render them harmless.

In Cologne on Saturday, several dozen people gathered in the city's Cathedral Square to demonstrate against the war in Syria. Participation largely consisted of veterans from the former peace movement. There was barely anyone in attendance from political parties or organizations.

On Sunday around 500 people demonstrated in front of Berlin's Brandenburg Gate. The protest had been called several weeks ago to coincide with Germany's traditional Anti-war day and to protest German arms exports. At the last moment, the organizers changed the theme of the demonstration to reflect the most recent developments. Syrian Baathists and local representatives of the Left Party attended.

The largest protest was held in Frankfurt. The protest had been called by Arab and Syrian associations across the country. In attendance were around one thousand opponents of the war, most of whom had immediate family or friends in Syria. The demonstration was dominated by pro-Assad forces carrying Syrian national flags and placards featuring the Syrian president.

None of the organizations involved in Germany's so-called peace movement, which officially called for the protests, made any attempt at a serious mobilization. That was the reason for the low participation at the protests.

The organizers used the demonstrations to control the widespread opposition to the war and render it ineffective. They are fearful that such demonstrations

may develop into much larger protests against the war-mongering by political leaders and the media. To this end speakers at the protests were selected who already have a history of opposing a genuine anti-war movement.

A central role in this respect was played by the Left Party. The party made no effort to mobilize its own members and supporters for demonstrations, but at the same time provided high-profile speakers in every city. The speakers in Berlin included the Left Party parliamentary deputy Christine Buchholz and deputy party chairman, Jan van Aken. Sevim Dagdelen (Left Party MP) spoke in Cologne, and the foreign policy spokesman of the Left Party, Wolfgang Gehrcke in Frankfurt.

In his speech Gehrcke tried to deny that German imperialism had particular interests at stake in a war and to deter opposition to military action by the Merkel government. German interests lay in preventing a war, Gehrcke declared. Therefore one should demand the government offer humanitarian aid to Syria, rather than intervening militarily.

Finally he made an appeal to Obama: "I urge all parties in the conflict ... Talk to one another, stop the violence, take measures to ensure that the international conference on Syria originally initiated by the US and Russia takes place in Geneva."

As both the US and German government aggressively prepare an imperialist war in Syria, Gehrcke strives to present their leaders as beacons of peace. This is a cynical maneuver with which the Left Party seeks to cover its own tracks.

For months, leading members of the Left Party, including its chairperson Katja Kipping and her deputy, Jan van Aken, participated in the "Freedom needs assistance" campaign with the SPD and Greens,

demanding that the Western powers provide more weapons to Syrian rebel militias. During the past two years, representatives of the Left Party and its Rosa Luxemburg Foundation have worked diligently to promote the pro-imperialist Syrian opposition.

Gehrcke was booed and jeered by some participants at the Frankfurt demonstration, who came to register deep felt opposition to the war and their distrust of official political and media propaganda. One demonstrator from Baden-Württemberg bore a placard which made a direct parallel between the current preparations for war against Syria and Hitler's aggression against Poland in 1939.

Matthias expressed his anger about the current situation. "The US and some circles are running amok and disclosing their criminal side," he said. "I really fear they will once again wage war as they did in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. If the war expands to Iran it will have enormous repercussions."

Behnam, who described himself as a "left-wing activist from Iran" was demonstrating against the war together with several friends. "We reject any interference by imperialist powers, by America or NATO in Syria. This affects not only any intervention with bombs, but also their supplies of weapons to Islamic groups. Every child knows nowadays that the so-called freedom fighters in Syria not only receive weapons but also money from America, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Turkey and all reactionary forces. They are fighting against the Syrian people."

Behnam said he was "totally against war, against any acts of interference by reactionary forces." The fate of the people of Syria must "be decided by the Syrian people. If they opt for Assad, I would accept that, but they must be able to decide for themselves."

A woman who accompanied him, said: "I am totally against war, but I am opposed to Assad. The German government is obviously in favor of this war, although it does not openly admit it. You cannot believe it. Germany sells chemical weapons itself, it is involved in crimes against humanity such as in Halabja. The government cannot be trusted."



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