

German police declare parts of Hamburg “no-go zone”

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Early Saturday morning, police in the northern German city of Hamburg declared the entire district of St. Pauli and large parts of Altona, Eimsbüttel and Sternschanze to be a “no-go zone.” The announcement of such a broad “no-go area” is unprecedented in German post-war history. In such areas police officers are entitled to arbitrarily check and search any individual and demand they leave the zone.

Police authorities justified the measure by arguing that there had been a number of attacks on police stations. In the most recent incident, police claim a mob attacked a Hamburg station on December 28, allegedly injuring one police officer seriously. In fact witness accounts published by *Der Spiegel* refute the official police version of what took place.

The police are now using this dubious incident to terrorize and intimidate the population of entire neighbourhoods. On Sunday night alone, 263 people were stopped in the “no-go zone,” according to a police report, and 62 individuals were instructed to leave the area.

The *Hamburger Morgenpost* reported that a group of young people were stopped and searched on the way into a nightclub. Although police found nothing suspicious, the young people were told to leave the area. One policeman allegedly justified the order by declaring that the young people looked like leftists. The newspaper then quotes a young woman who said, “Yes, we are. And where is the problem? This is a total insult.”

The right to freedom of assembly is abolished in the “no-go zone.” People had gathered in various spots to protest such state intimidation, but they were promptly dispersed by police. On Saturday evening, 60 people gathered in front of the *Rote Flora* alternative cultural centre. They were immediately surrounded by police,

who asked every protester to provide identity papers. Two-thirds of those present were then taken into custody.

The districts affected have been declared a “no-go area” for an indefinite period. According to the *Morgenpost*, police intend to maintain the ban on assembly until the spring. This means that tens of thousands of residents will be deprived of basic democratic rights and subjected to months of harassment by police.

This police action has the support of the Hamburg Senate, which is headed by the Social Democratic Party. “We strongly support the efforts of the police to fully exploit the legal framework to pre-emptively counter new attacks,” said SPD domestic policy spokesman Arno Münster.

The recent police operation is part of a broader ongoing campaign. Over the past few months the mayor of Hamburg, Olaf Scholz, has systematically curtailed democratic rights, enforced police-state type measures, and escalated conflicts with anarchist groups in order to create a pretext for further police action. Scholz is a national deputy chairman of the SPD.

In October of last year, the SPD administration organized a comprehensive search for African migrants. The police were instructed to apprehend and search all citizens with dark skin in order to identify refugees without proper identification. At this time, around 300 African migrants lived in the city. They had formerly worked in Libya, before fleeing the recent war and ending up on the Italian island of Lampedusa.

To escape the inhuman conditions at their detention camp, they had moved to Hamburg, where the Senate subsequently ordered them to leave. Eighty of them then took refuge in a church.

Since then, there have been regular solidarity

demonstrations for the refugees involving thousands of people. Although the protesters behaved peacefully, police sought to aggravate the situation and increasingly intimidate the protesters, week to week.

There was then a confrontation between demonstrators and police on December 21 following attempts to evict squatters from the *Rote Flora* centre. The owner of the building wants to demolish the centre and replace it with a commercial project.

Almost 10,000 people gathered outside the building to protest the eviction of residents. Shortly after the demonstration had formed, police blocked the road and began attacking demonstrators. Small groups of police repeatedly charged the demonstration in a deliberate attempt at escalation.

Some members of the so-called anarchist “black block”—which is known to be infiltrated by state agent provocateurs—then threw bottles, stones and fireworks. Police responded with water cannons and attacked the crowd with tear gas and rubber truncheons. Up to 500 protesters were injured, some seriously.

The *tageszeitung* quoted an anonymous informant from the ranks of the Hamburg police, who stated that the riots had been deliberately provoked by the police to stop the “hated leftist scene.” In order to do this, the authorities were prepared to accept, or indeed wanted “collateral damage,” the informant declared.

The establishment of the “no-go area” shows that the persecution of the “left scene” and of refugees is aimed at curtailing the democratic rights of the entire population. As social attacks continue, causing mounting unemployment and poverty, the ruling elite is preparing to defend its privileges by beefing up the state.

According to the Joint Welfare Association poverty in Hamburg has increased from 13.1 percent in 2008 to 14.8 percent in 2012. After Bremen and North Rhine-Westphalia, Hamburg is the West German state with the third highest unemployment rate: 8.6 percent in 2012.

Olaf Scholz, who heads the only SPD majority state administration in Germany, has made a name for himself as a law-and-order politician. In 2001 in his post as Hamburg’s Interior Senator he introduced the forcible administration of emetics to preserve evidence against drug dealers. He continued this brutal policy even after one drug addict died as a consequence in

December 2001.

In 2007, Scholz was appointed Labour Minister in the first grand coalition led by Angela Merkel. In this position, he played a key role in implementing the fierce social attacks that accompanied the 2008 financial crisis and bank bailouts. He was also instrumental in raising the retirement age to 67.

Last year, Scholz was one of the main architects of the current grand coalition. Together with Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democratic Union), he led the coalition negotiations in the key working group for finance, which drew up the austerity policies of the new government.

In Hamburg, Scholz has now demonstrated how the state intends to deal with resistance to these policies. The austerity measures drawn up by the government are incompatible with basic democratic rights.

Scholz is supported by the Left Party. Prior to the demonstration in December, the Left Party agreed on a joint appeal with the fractions of the SPD, CDU, and Greens which gave the Senate and police a free hand. The appeal declares it is permissible to question and discuss “a right to stay for a group of Africans in Hamburg....Nobody is ignoring the fate of refugees.”

While police were hunting down refugees in the city, the Left Party issued a statement with the ruling SPD, stating: “As a port city and cosmopolitan metropolis with a distinct culture Hamburg has always been starting point for people of different origins searching protection from persecution, war and poverty. The city ... will rise to the challenge of taking in new refugees.”

The statement went on to condemn violence by demonstrators, including “graffiti in deputies’ chambers,” but said nothing about the police violence. The party’s stance completely glosses over the real state of social relations in Hamburg.



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