

German workers, youth speak on Ferguson: “This is not a democracy any more”

Our reporters
27 August 2014

The events in the US working class town of Ferguson, Missouri, where an unarmed 18-year-old was shot dead by the police, have been closely followed in Europe. The undisguised militarisation of the police—with armoured cars and machine guns, the declaration of a state of emergency, imposition of curfews and even the use of the National Guard—has met with incomprehension and indignation among both and old.

In Frankfurt, WSWs reporters spoke with people outside a hardware store and at a cinema. Customers, employees and passers-by stopped and took flyers with information about the events in Ferguson, with some speaking indignantly about the police murder.

Sonja was on her way home from the hardware store where she works. She stopped briefly and said she had “seen on the news how this boy was simply shot. Horrible”. However, she was not really surprised, because “one knows things like this happen [in America]. They have been conducting war for years”. Asked about the fact that Germany was now also involved militarily in northern Iraq, she said spontaneously, “This is the worst thing ever, our government is providing weapons to crisis areas. I ask myself, how long has it been that things have changed so much?”

Wolfgang, a 65-year-old pensioner, thinks that the events in Ferguson were certainly about racial issues, but that primarily they were about class issues. “Things will develop like that here as well”, he said. “Racial issues are always useful to distract from the government’s policies and the fact that the government is responsible for the conditions.” He finds the massive arming of the state, which can be seen in the television reports, really scary. “Armoured vehicles are being used, machine guns and attack helicopters. In the

background lies the economic crisis and social impoverishment.”

He added, “But what makes me most concerned is the danger of war, the strategic bombers with nuclear missiles, stationed by the USA on Poland’s eastern border, and a few kilometres away Russia is testing its nuclear missiles. If something goes wrong! That’s what makes me really scared. It’s as explosive as the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.”

Shaheda and Cemile are friends; Shaheda is an apprentice, while Cemile is looking for work. They are both of the opinion that it makes a difference whether someone has dark skin, hair and eyes. “We have made the experience here in Frankfurt, too. The police simply react differently if someone looks like a foreigner.”

Cemile recalls, “I was treated like a piece of dirt by the police.” They both agreed that poverty definitely plays a role. “[In Ferguson] it was apparently in a neighbourhood where many young people are unemployed and hanging around. But that’s no reason. The boy was unarmed, had lifted up his hands, and yet he was shot—unbelievable”.

Cemile reflected, “Even if the police chief is black, or if you have a president like Obama, who is not white himself, it’s no use. Poverty no longer interests such people once they have climbed the ladder.” And Shaheda added, “Just look at what has happened in Gaza: Hundreds of children are dying there, and no one in the government is interested.”

Jana and Jasmine, two school pupils, think the police in Missouri are deliberately intimidating people. “This is not a democracy any more,” said Jasmin. “The people should not be suppressed in such a way. If a boy can be shot simply for being on the street, that is no longer normal life.”

Gary stopped and said, “Yes, I heard about that. It

really shocked me.” He continued, “If you compare that with Germany, where the police do not use their weapons so readily, and that this boy was riddled with six bullets, then there’s definitely something wrong. The boy had no weapon, he was just not quick enough getting out of the road. For this, his life was wiped out, that’s horrible.”

However, it had “not really surprised him to hear of it happening in America, although it is, of course, terrifying. But honestly, you almost expect it. As you already said, it’s not a race, but a social issue.”

In Berlin, WSWS reporters spoke to students and passers-by in front of the Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm Centre, which also houses the central library of Humboldt University. The conversations revolved around the issues of growing poverty in America, racism and the US gun laws.

Sophia, a 28-year-old PhD student, thought that racial issues and social issues could not be separated. Blacks did not have the same opportunities as whites. But regardless of skin colour, the United States was marked by great inequality, she said.

She was very critical of the attacks on democratic freedoms in the United States. Democracy at home and ongoing wars abroad were not compatible. Now, the methods of war were coming back to the US. “The events in Ferguson show the real attitude of the American government towards democratic freedoms”, she said.

One student placed the arrest of journalists in Ferguson in this context: While the United States wants to present itself to the world as a bulwark of democracy, and preaches democracy and freedom everywhere, the US government was trying to prevent the world knowing what really was going on at home.

Robert, 24, an Asia-Africa regional studies student, said the suppression of democratic rights in the United States was closely connected with the suppression of the entire population. He pointed to the mass spying by the National Security Agency, and the targeted manipulation of the media.

The question of whether something comparable with Ferguson could be imagined in Germany provoked divided reactions. Robert believed that due to the historical experience with fascism, resistance against a looming police state would rapidly develop.

In contrast, remedial teacher Karolin, 33, reported that only recently the police had beaten up a man who would not provide ID. “The aggressiveness of the police here in Germany is frightening”, she said. “That scares me.” She thought the media would stress the question of racism in connection with Ferguson, because a white man had shot a black man.

Twenty-seven-year-old student Martin saw things the same way. There were certainly racist tendencies in the police and in the security apparatus, he said, but it was very striking that many whites could be seen in the film reports about the protests in Ferguson.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact