100,000 protest against Pegida in Germany

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The German media reported on Tuesday that the twelfth Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West) demonstration held the previous day was the largest thus far. Sources put the number of participants at between 20,000 and 25,000. There were also anti-Islamic and right-wing extremist protests in other cities. But the marches outside of Dresden were much smaller than expected. In Leipzig, 4,800 Pegida supporters marched through the city. In Berlin, Düsseldorf and Saarbrücken there were only a few hundred.

Much bigger protest marches were held by Pegida's opponents. The largest was in Leipzig, with more than 35,000 people protesting against Pegida's racist propaganda. In Munich, 20,000 people demonstrated, 17,000 in Hannover, 7,000 in Dresden, 4,000 in Hamburg, and in Düsseldorf, 5,000.

Protests involving more than 1,000 participants also took place in Rostock, Schwerin, Saarbrücken and Mainz. Many participants in these demonstrations not only criticised Pegida's racist slogans, but also the anti-immigrant policies of the German government.

The large number of anti-Pegida demonstrators refutes media claims about widespread fear and concern among the German population about refugees and the "foreign infiltration" of society.

In reality, the protests in Dresden by Pegida, led by the convicted drug dealer Lutz Bachmann, initially only drew a few hundred right-wing participants. But they were deliberately supported and encouraged by politicians and the media.

The organisers of the Pegida demonstrations and their backers in the media have attempted, in recent days, to exploit the shock of many people over the terrorist attack against the satire magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, and use it for their own ends.

In Dresden, they sought to take advantage of the events for their own racist and anti-Islamic propaganda, calling for a march of mourning. People were to turn up with a black ribbon. However, as in previous weeks, German flags and racist slogans predominated.

In addition, several regional banners were held up, demonstrating that this is in no way a spontaneous movement of the Dresden population. Rather, right-wing extremists from across Germany are mobilising for the marches and bussing in participants, with the open support of the fascist NPD.

A study by the Dresden Technical University revealed that the demonstrations are made up overwhelmingly of privileged sections of the middle class which earn above-average incomes but are fearful of descending the social ladder. The study surveyed 400 demonstrators.

These reactionary elements are being deliberately mobilised to secure a right-wing base for the government's policies of social attacks and militarism. With the terrorist attacks in Paris, the anti-Islamic agitation is being sharply intensified and directly linked to the restriction of democratic rights and other police state measures.

This is the intensification of a reactionary campaign that has been led by politicians and the media for several weeks, expressed most openly by Pegida. It has been led by the right-wing daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), whose co-editor Berthold Kohler warned in December that the demands of the Pegida demonstrations had to be taken seriously, and which called for an immigration policy directed solely at meeting the interests of the state.

FAZ provided space for the co-leader of the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) Konrad Adam, to launch an anti-Muslim tirade. Then, on Monday, Matthias Alexander attacked anti-fascist protesters in Frankfurt in the same newspaper, because they had prevented the right-wing mob from continuing their march.

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The Springer press is not far behind FAZ with its chauvinism. In a guest commentary for *Die Welt* entitled “Learning from Islam means learning to win,” the notorious Islamophobe Henry M. Broder declared cynically that “it is about the relation of two cultures, of which one is aggressive and the other defensive.” Of course it was Islam that was portrayed as the “aggressive culture” which inevitably produces terrorists and attackers.

As if the colonisation of the Middle East, the two world wars and the numerous interventions by the Western powers that claimed the lives of millions in recent years had never taken place, Broder stated that the Islamic religion was the source of terrorism. This is all the more repugnant in that all of today’s terrorist organisations were established and funded by Western governments to enforce their interests in the region.

German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière was the first high-ranking politician to encourage and support Pegida, and is now being absolutely clear about where this anti-Islamic propaganda is leading.

Shortly after the attacks in Paris, de Maizière raised the demand for the storage of electronic data, regardless of whether someone is a suspect. In addition, he enforced travel restrictions on alleged Jihadists in cooperation with his cabinet colleague Heiko Mass (Social Democrat). The travelling of Jihadis abroad has thus already been made a criminal offence, although this amounts in practice to the introduction of a thought crime.

There are supporters of restricting democratic rights in every parliamentary party. Left Party representatives demanded an increase in police. The general secretary of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Saxony and parliamentary deputy Michael Kretschmer stated that he was in favour of implementing a tightening of the right to asylum and a firmer approach to the deportation of refugees.

In Saxony, under the guise of a “dialogue with concerned citizens,” the state centre for political education has provided a platform for Pegida supporters to agitate publicly against refugees and Muslims. The organisation’s director, Frank Richter, explained that “Pegida is a large movement bringing together the disappointed and frustrated who are willing to protest.”

Prior to this, Saxony’s state president Stanislaw Tillich declared his readiness to enter a dialogue with Pegida, only reluctantly backing a counter-demonstration in Dresden that took place last Saturday. Saxony’s state government had initially planned to hold the rally under the slogan “We are one city, one country, one people,” a slogan that could have appeared on a Pegida march.

Only after protests and the withdrawal of refugee groups was the title changed to “for Dresden, for Saxony, for cosmopolitanism, humanity and dialogue in cooperation.” Around 35,000 people took part in the rally, which was above all directed against the Saxony state government’s policy of embracing the Pegida organisers. The speech by Tillich was drowned out with the call for a halt to the deportations of refugees.

In other locations, attempts have also been made to redirect the anger of the population over Pegida behind the government and opposition parties. For example, “the unity of all democrats” that was proclaimed on Tuesday at the Brandenburg Gate by German President Joachim Gauck, Chancellor Angela Merkel (both CDU), and Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) was aimed solely at covering over their own right-wing politics.

With their effective abolition of the right to asylum in 1993, it was the SPD and CDU that established the basis for excluding asylum seekers from Europe. The division of society is being driven forward by the German government, which defames refugees as “spongers” and views all Muslims as suspects.

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