

Berlin police raid: A civil war exercise

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On the evening of January 13, a contingent of five squadrons of the Berlin police and two SWAT teams raided 94 Riga Street in the district of Friedrichshain, a housing block inhabited by members of the Berlin alternative scene.

The surrounding area between Liebig Street and Zelle Street was cordoned off by 300 police officers, while two SWAT teams entered the building via the roof using a fire ladder. This was followed by another 200 police officers storming the building and searching it from the basement to the roof for “dangerous objects”.

The police claimed that their large-scale operation did not involve entering any apartments but only searching the hallways, basements and attics of the front and rear parts of the building. In a joint statement, however, residents confirmed that doors to the building and to apartments along with furniture and household appliances were destroyed and the Internet connection disrupted.

At no time were residents of the neighbourhood informed of the reason for the police operation. They report that the police also broke down apartment doors and wantonly destroyed and soiled items such as mirrors, bookshelves and record players. When residents demanded police show a judicial search warrant, they were dismissed with a laugh. Some were violently forced out of the building by the SWAT team, an action that according to a number of residents even shocked several members of the riot police.

A police helicopter flew overhead for hours at low altitude while police dogs barked. It was an eerie scene that frightened many neighbours. Residents along the street had their IDs checked, and residents of the building were prevented from entering their apartments.

When a commune in the neighbouring Liebig Street played loud punk music in solidarity, police clambered onto the first floor balcony, smashed down the balcony door and seized the public address system in the

apartment.

The pretext for the onslaught was an assault on a police patrol officer at noon the same day. According to a police report, the officer was attacked by four teenagers and slightly injured when issuing a ticket. The youth then allegedly disappeared into number 94, which has long been inhabited by young people associated with the autonomous antifascist scene.

During the large-scale police operation, no resident was identified as having been involved in the midday confrontation with the patrol officer. All those temporarily detained for ID verification were released in the evening. Nevertheless, the police arbitrarily declared that “The building clearly serves as a retreat for violent criminals.”

A mother from a neighbouring housing block confirmed that the youth she observed fleeing from the police at noon were not inhabitants of the rear building. She complained that she was prevented from entering her apartment, where her children had to remain in panic during the massive police deployment.

The spurious grounds for the raid are further demonstrated by the fact that the police could produce neither a search warrant nor assert that they were responding to “imminent danger”. In remarks to the press before midnight, Police spokesman Stefan Redlich therefore referred to the General Security and Public Order Act (ASOG). He claimed the police had found “dangerous objects”—small paving stones, caltrops, fire extinguishers and propane canisters.

The justification for the raid on such flimsy grounds accompanied by references to the ASOG only makes it clear that the attack was an illegal action intended to intimidate an entire neighbourhood.

The inhabitants of 94 Riga Street announced they would employ legal means “to prevent this behaviour by the police becoming the norm and that those responsible politically be held accountable”.

A plaque at the entrance recalls that in the 1930s, the non-partisan administrative secretary Ernst Pahnke lived in this building. He had written poems against Nazism, which he duplicated and distributed together with friends. For this he was later sentenced to death by the Nazis and murdered in Berlin Plötzensee.

The large-scale nighttime police operation evokes disturbing memories of that era. It cannot be justified by the mid-day attack on the police officer. In reality, it was a civil war exercise in the context of the systematic arming of the police.

Since last Wednesday, the whole neighbourhood has been patrolled daily by several police vans. Police officers stand ostentatiously on street corners and check the identity of passers-by without any specific reason. Two teenagers dressed in punk attire who were walking their dogs told the WSWS that the police had checked their identity cards three times during their one-hour walk.

When hundreds of neo-Nazis threatened people with baseball bats, axes and paving stones, spreading panic among residents and causing damage amounting to several hundred thousand euros in the alternative district of Leipzig Connewitz on January 11, police did nothing. In Berlin, on the other hand, it took the alleged actions of just four young people to unleash a police operation involving more than 500 officers with helicopters and police dogs against an entire neighbourhood.



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