

Major police operation in Berlin prepares law-and-order election campaign

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16 July 2016

Two months ahead of the election for the state Senate in Berlin, there is growing opposition to the governing grand coalition, which stands for mass poverty, a housing crisis, corruption and bureaucratic arrogance towards refugees, the unemployed and all workers in the city.

According to the latest polls, only 40 percent of the population continues to support the two coalition parties—21 percent for the Social Democrats (SPD) and 19 percent for the Christian Democrats (CDU). The state government has responded with a massive law-and-order campaign.

This is the background to the events in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, which made nationwide headlines last weekend. They were deliberately, and as is now clear illegally, provoked by interior senator Frank Henkel (CDU) and the police under his command.

More than a thousand police, including federal officers and police from other German states, were deployed in civil war-style against 1,800 protesters, who were protesting the partial clearing of an occupied building in Rigaer Street on June 22 and the constant police harassment that residents have suffered ever since.

According to reports thus far, there were numerous injuries on both sides, including 123 police, according to police sources. Some 86 demonstrators were arrested and over 100 prosecutions initiated.

The building's owner is one of Berlin's notorious property sharks, the property fund Lafone Investment Limited, which is based in the British Virgin Islands tax haven. It has been trying for some time to drive the residents of 94 Rigaer Street from their homes, collaborating closely with the police in the process.

Repeated unrest and police attacks have occurred in and around the building, which has been occupied since

the early 1990s, mainly by people with rent contracts. At the end of 2015, the police declared Rigaer Street and the surrounding area an “area with excessive criminality,” i.e., a danger zone under the general law on security and public order, due to alleged regularity of politically-motivated crimes.

Ever since, police have conducted constant patrols in the district, carry out random checks on individuals and searched bags. On January 13, police stormed 94 Rigaer Street under the pretext that youth had fled into the building after attacking police. They searched the building from top to bottom, confiscated computers, bicycles and other objects and arrested residents.

Then on June 22, several hundred police intervened to clear the ground floor at the request of the owner—illegally, as the Berlin state court confirmed on Thursday. According to the court, the building's owner did not present an eviction notice or have a court representative present when it was carried out. The rights of the complainant, the friends' association of the bar located on the ground floor, were upheld by the court.

The property owner's claim that they wanted to clear the ground floor so it could be occupied by Syrian refugees was rejected by the residents. “We will not let ourselves be played off against each other, we are in solidarity with all refugees and fight for self-administered spaces for all, everywhere,” a press release stated. The refugee assistance organisation Moabit Helps dismissed the claim as a cynical pretext.

The repeated police actions in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg are mainly being justified by the suspicion of acts of criminality and the radical rhetoric of anarchist groups. However, the reality is that the police and state are pursuing a deliberate policy. They aim to whip up a feverish political climate in the capital and

push the political system further to the right, as well as justifying the establishment of authoritarian state structures.

Street battles against anarchist groups in Berlin are not new. They have been used for some time to justify the strengthening of police powers. In this, the police and anarchist activists essentially play into each other's hands. The police exploit the political inanity of the anarchist groups and frequently influence their actions, either indirectly as a result of provocations or directly via informants and spies.

At the beginning of July, the *Berliner Zeitung* reported the arrest of Marcel G, who was involved in a series of arson attacks on vehicles after the June 22 evictions. He had ties to far-right circles and apparently collaborated with the police, according to the report.

The latest street battle bears all the hallmarks of having been deliberately engineered by the Senate. The court ruling on the June 22 eviction revealed that both the eviction and the deployment of 300 police, which Henkel initiated as protection for the property owner, were illegal. Only after these illegal actions was the protest called last weekend. The supposition is, therefore, that the Senate intended the massive and violent clashes with the police at the rally to take place.

A despicable role in the engineering of this “orgy of violence” (Henkel) has been played by the media. They sought to outdo each other last Sunday with sensationalist reports about the police action and the injured officers.

In a piece headlined “Black July,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* correspondent Markus Wehner wrote, “Left-wing extremists want to plunge Berlin into chaos,” and his colleague Regina Mönch remarked that the Senate was showing too much regard for “left-wing terrorism.” *Der Spiegel* complained of the “lack of a concept” within Berlin politics, which had failed in a struggle against violence. The *Bayernkurier* spoke of a “summer of left-wing terror.”

Leading politicians from across the country weighed in on the law-and-order campaign. German Chancellor Merkel demanded the unrestricted recognition of “the state’s monopoly on force.” Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière declared in the *Berliner Zeitung*, “The firm measures now required there will be fully supported by me.” Christian Social Union General Secretary Andreas Scheuer called for more firmness against “enemies of

the state.”

The escalation of police violence and the virtual placing of an entire district of the city under a state of emergency are aimed at strengthening supporters of the nationalist Alternative for Germany (AfD) and preparing the ground for a right-wing government capable of suppressing the growing social opposition among the population in Berlin.

Interior senator Henkel even travelled to China in April in order to learn about the policing methods employed there; while CDU justice senator Thomas Heilmann’s appointment of AfD executive member Roman Reusch to the position of senior state prosecutor will ensure a right-wing hardline course in the judiciary.



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