

Berlin police to be armed with potentially lethal tasers

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The Berlin police are to be equipped with tasers capable of inflicting a lethal electric shock. This was announced by Berlin interior senator and lead candidate for the Christian Democratic Union for the upcoming state elections, Frank Henkel, and Berlin president of police, Klaus Kandt, at a joint press conference Wednesday at police headquarters in Tempelhof.

According to Henkel and Kandt, patrol officers are to receive the weapons for a three-year “test” period at the city’s central areas of Alexanderplatz and Friedrichstraße. Police see the potential for increased conflict in these areas. According to Henkel, tasers expand the options to resolve critical situations and can “save lives.”

In fact, tasers are anything but harmless or “life-saving” weapons. The tasers can deliver an electric shock to someone up to a range of 10 metres away. The high-voltage projectiles have sharp points on the end and can penetrate clothing up to a distance of 5 centimetres. When the projectiles have entered the body of a victim, they can be repeatedly given doses of high voltage by pressing the trigger.

Human rights organisations have repeatedly noted that the electric shock can be lethal, particularly for people with weak hearts. In August, former professional footballer Dalian Atkinson (48) died in England after the police employed a taser. According to a statement by Britain’s Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), Atkinson’s heart stopped approximately an hour-and-a-half after the attack. One of Atkinson’s nephews said that the former Aston Villa forward suffered from kidney and heart complaints.

According to a report by Amnesty International, 500 people in the United States alone died between 2001 and 2011 following the use of a taser. The *Washington*

Post reported late last year that between January and November 2015, at least 48 people died after they were tasered by police officers.

There is evidence that tasers reduce the inhibition to deploy weapons and thus contribute to brutalisation by police. According to the firm Taser’s own statistics, the weapons are used by practically all US police authorities and deployed an estimated 900 times per day. This means that almost every 90 seconds, someone is struck with a 50,000-volt electric shock in the US!

Henkel’s declaration that the potentially lethal weapons will now be deployed in Berlin is part of a wide-ranging campaign for the build-up of the state’s domestic powers which is being promoted by the CDU/CSU and backed by all parties in the federal parliament (Bundestag).

Also on Wednesday, Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière and Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen (both CDU) agreed with the interior ministers of Saarland (CDU), North Rhein-Westphalia (SPD) and Mecklenburg-Pomerania (CDU) on a major police and army exercise next February.

According to de Maizière, the exercise will be about “preparations for an improbable, but conceivable, situation” of “complicated, days-long, difficult conditions of terror.” The interior minister named potential tasks of the army as transportation, surveillance or traffic patrols by paratroopers.

North Rhein-Westphalia’s interior minister, Ralf Jäger (SPD), declared blandly on this illegal deployment of the Bundeswehr domestically, “I think we should accept this scenario dispassionately and without ideology.”

The SPD also indicated its agreement with Henkel’s move in Berlin. Tasers could close a gap between the use of firearms and pepper spray, stated interior

spokesman Frank Zimmermann on Tuesday on local radio RBB. However, this had to be carefully prepared. To propose such an idea just days before an election was more like a desperate gamble rather than sustainable security policy.

The nominal opposition parties also criticise Henkel and the CDU essentially from the right. The Greens, which in May called in their own paper for “a well-equipped and trained police force in terms of personnel, technology and guidelines,” described Henkel’s proposal as electioneering. “This is a last act of desperation from Frank Henkel. He would do better to take care of the basic equipping of the police, firing ranges and protective vests,” said the Greens’ parliamentary group chair in the Berlin state parliament Ramona Pop.

Due to electoral considerations, the Left Party spoke out against the tasers. But they are among the strongest advocates for a major strengthening of the police. In an official statement by Left Party Chairman Bernd Riexinger on the recently published “Berlin statement” by the CDU/CSU’s federal and state interior ministers, it was said, “One step in the right direction is (...) the increase of personnel for the police by 15,000 posts.” But this would “only barely reverse the years-long cuts to personnel made in the police.”

The law-and-order measures in the “Berlin statement” obviously do not go far enough for Riexinger and the Left Party. Along with the racist partial ban on the burka, the statement also demands an expansion of temporary data collection, more resources and powers for the intelligence services, electronic tags for people yet to be convicted, comprehensive video surveillance, the militarisation of the police and the deployment of the Bundeswehr domestically.

The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG) is the only party which decisively opposes the domestic build-up of state power and warns of the historical and political consequences of this. In its election statement for the Berlin State House of Representatives, “Vote against war! Vote PSG!” it states:

“Militarism and social inequality cannot be reconciled with democracy. In the 1930s, Germany’s elites reacted to the global economic crisis by handing power to Hitler. Now, they are once again preparing emergency measures and dictatorship.

“Their pretext is the fight against ‘terrorism.’ But

terrorist attacks themselves are a result of the policy of war. Al Qaeda and Islamic State were built up by the Western intelligence agencies against unpopular regimes and were only able to spread as a result of the wars in Iraq and Syria.

“The real target of increased state powers is the working class. These powers are being used to intimidate and repress opposition. The ruling class is alarmed by the worldwide rise in labor disputes, and anticipates fierce opposition to its policies of militarism and war.”

The vast majority of Berliners reject the reactionary plans of the ruling class. It is high time to actively oppose them and support the PSG’s election campaign. What is required is the building of an international, socialist movement to fight against war, dictatorship and capitalism.



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