

Police rampage against G20 protestors in Hamburg

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Just after 7.20 p.m. on Thursday, German authorities ordered a brutal police assault on a demonstration against the G20 leaders' summit, which formally begins today in Hamburg. Hours after the clashes, figures still had not been released on how many people were injured or arrested.

Up to 120,000 people from across Germany and other parts of Europe are expected to travel to Hamburg to voice their opposition to the austerity, anti-refugee measures, nationalism and militarism that characterise the policies of all the governments and ruling elites of the world's 20 largest economies.

Thursday's protest, one of the first of dozens planned during the G20, was entitled "Welcome to Hell." It was organised to coincide with a sideline meeting at the nearby Hotel Atlantic between US President Donald Trump—a reviled figure in Europe—and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The violence at the event was provoked by the police.

As some 10,000 demonstrators were assembling in Hamburg's harbour district around 6.00 p.m., *Deutsche Welle* reported that its correspondent, Max Hofmann, "says the feeling at the 'Welcome to Hell' protest is that of a large family gathering." Hofmann commented: "If you're looking for a common denominator here it's anti-capitalism, anti-globalisation and, of course, anti-Donald Trump." The gathering was peaceful and, if anything, had a festive character.

Police nevertheless used the presence at the protest of some 800 to 1,000 anarchist Black Block members, some of whom were wearing masks, to prevent the demonstrators from marching through the city as planned. After they had barely moved 300 metres, dozens of vehicles and lines of riot police blocked their path and issued demands that the anarchist element remove their masks. When some refused, and allegedly

threw rocks and bottles at journalists and police, the state rampage was initiated.

Scenes of confusion and panic followed. One protestor who declined to be named told Bloomberg correspondents: "We were standing there and the police suddenly blocked the march. At some point, we heard a loud bang and everybody started running. It's really a shame."

Video footage posted by participants shows sections of the demonstration being assaulted with water cannon and tear gas and then "kettled"—or surrounded—by shielded and baton-wielding riot squads.

One of the 100 volunteer lawyers on hand, Matthias Wisbar, told *Der Spiegel* that the emergency legal service established to assist the G20 demonstrations received "hundreds" of calls from injured or arrested people. Local residents with young families complained that the violence forced them to leave their homes out of fear.

While small groups of anarchists engaged in running battles with police, set some vehicles ablaze and carried out acts of vandalism, the bulk of the protestors retreated and reassembled several hours later and held an entirely peaceful demonstration at another location.

The police actions appear to have been a test of their riot tactics, ahead of possible attacks on the larger protests due to take place today and on Saturday, as well as a calculated attempt to intimidate people into not joining them.

The pretext for both last night's attack, and future police operations, had been given well in advance. Some five hours before blocking the demonstration, Hamburg police spokesperson Timo Zill told journalists: "Militant protestors who exercise violence are not protected by Article 8"—the nominal "freedom of assembly" clause in Germany's basic law. Zill

included in the definition of “violence” any demonstrators who “disguise themselves.”

Protest organisers followed these statements with an explicit appeal to the police not to provoke an incident. One told *Der Spiegel* that if “the police don’t exploit the advantage of every masked [protester] and a firecracker here and there to escalate the situation, then the protest will end peacefully.”

The police proceeded to do the exact opposite.

Protestors denounced the assault on their right to demonstrate. Mark Meyer, another volunteer lawyer, told CNN: “The police wanted to crash and smash this demo from the beginning.” Julia, a 27-year-old from Frankfurt, said: “If this is all we can do... just showing our opinion and giving a statement, and if the state forces are just shutting us up ... I mean what kind of state do we live in?”

The G20 summit as a whole has been utilised by the German state to rehearse placing a major urban area under what can only be described as a police occupation. An estimated 20,000 police and some 3,000 vehicles, assembled from across the country, have been deployed to Hamburg—Germany’s second largest city with a population of some 1.7 million.

Heavily-armed paramilitary special units, such as sniper squads, are deployed at key locations in and around the venues where G20 events are scheduled to take place. All access to such areas has been proscribed, except for local residents. Helicopters are almost continuously in the air, conducting aerial surveillance.

The occupation of the city has involved the wholesale monitoring of peoples’ movements in combined police and intelligence operations across Europe. Hamburg police have admitted that demonstrators were tracked as they travelled to the city from at least Scandinavia, Switzerland and Italy.

The turn to ever-more authoritarian forms of rule is a universal process in what were once lauded as the “Western democracies.”

Similar police-state mobilisations have accompanied G20 summits over the past decade in cities such as London, Pittsburgh, Toronto, Seoul, Cannes and Brisbane. The suppression of protests has resulted in hundreds of people being injured and arrested and, in London in 2009, a demonstrator being killed at the hands of the police.



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