

Hamburg under police lockdown

Johannes Stern
8 July 2017

Heavily-armed police units repeatedly disperse protests with armoured vehicles and water cannon and attack protesters with batons, pepper spray and rubber bullets.

Journalists are attacked and lawyers for the demonstrators classified by the police as “dangerous” because of their political beliefs.

A de facto ban on demonstrations is in force throughout an entire city of several million people, and on virtually every street corner there is a police checkpoint.

No, this is not Cairo, where the dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sisi drowned protests against his Western-backed military regime in blood. This is Hamburg, the normally rather tranquil German metropolis. Today, as host city of the G20 summit, it resembles a police state.

More than 20,000 police from across the country have been mobilized to crush all protests against the world’s major capitalist governments.

On the eve of Saturday’s demonstration, expected to draw 100,000 G20 opponents, the ranks of the police have once again been increased. Two hundred additional officers have been sent from Baden-Württemberg and more than 200 from Mecklenburg-Pomerania. Three additional units have been dispatched by the red-red-green (Social Democratic Party-Left Party-Green Party) state government of Berlin. Hamburg itself is governed by a red-green coalition under Social Democratic (SPD) Mayor Olaf Scholz. The SPD, Greens and Left Party are thus playing a central role in the police state build-up and assault on basic democratic rights.

The brutal actions carried out by police on Thursday against a demonstration organized under the slogan “Welcome to Hell” further escalated the situation in the city. In the Schanzen district, a stronghold of anarchist groups, there were scenes reminiscent of a civil war as police clashed with demonstrators. Special Forces

operated with helicopters and armoured vehicles and forced their way into the district with machine guns cocked. The security forces attacked journalists and refused to allow them to document the crackdown.

The police intervention on Thursday evening was so brutal and provocative that even some bourgeois media outlets criticised it. “The police acted at times so harshly that people panicked,” wrote *Der Spiegel*. Based on the pretext that some members of the so-called black block were hooded, police used armoured vehicles to stop the peaceful demonstration after 300 metres. They then proceeded to fire water cannon and tear gas into the crowd. “The police accepted that there could be deaths,” said Christoph Kleine from “G20 Platform.”

On its “Monitor” programme, Public broadcaster ARD focused on the savage and unlawful methods used by the Hamburg security forces. Responsibility for this lies with the police director, Hartmut Dudde, who was installed by Social Democratic Interior Senator Michael Neumann in 2012. Courts have repeatedly confirmed that the director has “violated applicable laws,” by arresting, kettling and “provoking left-wing demonstrators.”

Already last Sunday, the Hamburg police forcibly cleared a camp that had been sanctioned by an administrative court. Even outside the 38,000 square kilometre zone where demonstrations are banned, the security forces have acted ruthlessly against protests.

Journalist Martin Eimermacher told Monitor, “My arm with the media identification was shoved aside. With blows and kicks we were effectively kettled. I called out on several occasions that I was from the media and wanted out of there. And then my face was sprayed with pepper spray, which was sprayed at us from at most half a metre away.”

The German government gave its explicit backing to the police action. Chancellor Angela Merkel publicly

thanked the security forces. They had her “full support” for their very demanding job, she said. “But violent demonstrations endanger human lives,” she added. They were therefore “not to be tolerated.”

Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel hypocritically expressed his empathy for the protesters in the *Passauer Neue Presse*, but only to make his real standpoint clear. In “democratic countries,” he said, it had to be possible “for heads of state and government from around the world to meet and speak with each other.” The main criticism should not be “directed at such an event, but at the violent demonstrations.”

Who does Gabriel think he is kidding with his phrases about “democracy” that obviously serve to justify brutal police violence? The events in Hamburg expose the true character of German imperialism. It is not a progressive alternative to the right-wing “America First” policies of US President Donald Trump, but rather its German equivalent.

The return of German great power politics, which has above all been pushed by Gabriel and the Social Democrats, is inseparably bound up with the establishment of a police state and the mobilisation of far-right forces.

The Alternative for Germany (AfD) called yesterday for a “zero tolerance strategy” against protesters. “Left-wing demonstrators can no longer be treated with kid gloves, but should be dealt with for what they are: terrorists,” stated Alice Weidel, the AfD’s lead candidate in the upcoming federal election.

Right-wing extremist Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski also demanded that the police adopt tough measures. On his Twitter account, he shared a post from Felix Leidecker, the Mainz chairman of the Junge Union, the CDU’s youth movement, stating: “There can be no more ‘more of the same’ in dealing with left-wing extremism in this country after Hamburg. The legal order must defend itself now!”

With its aggressive and hysterical actions, the ruling class is responding to the growing opposition to social cuts and war that has found expression in the widespread hostility to the G20 summit. The budget-cutting policies of recent years, which all capitalist parties have supported, have produced a social catastrophe across Europe and made Germany one of the most unequal countries in the world. On Thursday, the Hans-Böckler Foundation published a study

according to which the percentage of the working population classified as poor in spite of regular employment doubled between 2004 and 2014 to 9.6 percent, or 3.7 million people.

On the other side, a tiny privileged elite, whose representatives are meeting in Hamburg, has enriched itself obscenely, exploiting the 2008 financial crisis to vastly increase its wealth. According to a study by development charity Oxfam, eight billionaires, six of whom come from the US, possess more wealth than the poorest half of the world’s population, 3.6 billion people. Thirty-six German billionaires own as much wealth (€276 billion) as the poorest half of the German population.

It is simply impossible to impose such levels of social inequality and the return of German militarism without a police state. Hamburg must be taken as a warning. Some seven decades after the end of the Nazi regime of terror, Germany’s ruling elite is throwing overboard all of the basic democratic principles it was forced to recognise through gritted teeth in the post-war era. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) is the only party fighting to give the growing opposition to war, dictatorship and social cuts a conscious political perspective. Only an international socialist movement of the working class can stop the ruling elite’s police state measures and prevent a descent into barbarism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact