

After Hamburg protests, German government plans crackdown on left-wing views

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Following demonstrations by tens of thousands of people in the city of Hamburg over the weekend, the German political establishment has stepped up its campaign to criminalize political opposition and attack fundamental democratic rights.

In a long-planned military-police operation, some 20,000 police were mobilized from throughout Germany and the European Union to suppress largely peaceful demonstrators. As helicopters and fighter jets flew over the city of Hamburg, heavily-armed police, some brandishing machine guns and carbines, carried out hundreds of arrests, beat protesters with batons, sprayed them with water cannon, and doused them with tear gas and pepper spray.

Incidents of vandalism by a small group of petty-bourgeois anarchists were used as the flimsy pretext for this massive police crackdown. Amid widespread infiltration of anarchist groups by German police, there can be no doubt that actions by police *agent provocateurs*, planned and coordinated ahead of time, played a major role in the disturbances.

With the conclusion of the G20 summit, the German political establishment has only stepped up its campaign to crack down on political dissent. In an interview with the *Bild* newspaper, Social Democratic Party (SPD) Justice Minister Heiko Maas called for the creation of a European-wide database of "left-wing extremists," referring to protesters as "anti-social hard-core criminals," who had "committed serious crimes in Hamburg, including attempted murder."

Maas went on to call for a "Rock Against the Left" concert to target left-wing "extremists," declaring, "I would hope that any form of political extremism, which encourages senseless violence, even attempted murder, would not remain without a social reaction."

The slogan "Rock Against the Left" had previously been associated with neo-Nazi rock bands such as

"Freikorps" and "Sturmfront." The far-right press in Germany warmly welcomed Maas's proposal. The "new right" *Junge Freiheit* newspaper quoted a statement by Nazi-linked German-Italian rock band Frei Wild calling on right-wing musical acts to mobilize against the left in response to the events in Hamburg.

Armin Schuster, a parliamentarian with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the party of Chancellor Angela Merkel, called for shutting down community spaces used by left-wing political groups. "Left-wing centers like Rote Flora in Hamburg and Rigaer Strasse in Berlin need to be systematically closed down," he declared. He said Germany should have no tolerance for "lawless spaces, either for Arab clans, Islamists or neo-Nazis, and not for left-wing radicals either."

CDU Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière declared, for his part, "The events surrounding the G20 summit must be a turning point in our view of the left-wing scene's readiness to use violence."

He boasted that "several hundred" people had been turned away from Germany's borders in recent days on the basis of their left-wing political views as a result of tightened border security measures ahead of the G20. Other members of the CDU called for these temporary measures to be made permanent, claiming that the border controls led to the capture of criminals.

European officials backed up the repression of protesters, with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker saying the actions of the police warranted "compliments, not criticism." He added that the police response represented "Hamburg at its best."

The widespread attack on political opposition takes place in advance of federal elections in September in which the two leading parties, the CDU and SPD, are seeking to outflank each other from the right by whipping up a law-and-order hysteria, xenophobia and hatred of refugees.

If anything, the nominally “left” Social Democrats have taken the more extreme position. After a series of disastrous electoral failures, reflecting this broadly despised organization’s loss of credibility as a party of social reform, the SPD is seeking to appeal to fascistic elements previously attracted to the extreme-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Since the last federal election in 2013, both parties have been conspiring, with the support of the media, to bully the public into accepting a revival by Germany of great-power imperialist politics. This has entailed a massive rearmament and expansion of the country’s military and intelligence forces and the promotion of fascistic intellectual figures such as Jörg Baberowski, the Humboldt University academic who notoriously declared that “Hitler was not vicious,” as part of an effort to whitewash the crimes of German imperialism.

The attack on left-wing political views in Germany is part of a breakdown of democratic forms of rule and the implementation of police state measures throughout Europe. Since November 2015, France has been under a state of emergency, which, under the Hollande government, was used to subject opponents of the draconian El Khomri labor law to arbitrary and indefinite house arrest.

The moves against left-wing political organizations constitute an effort to pre-empt and intimidate widespread popular opposition to militarism and social inequality, expressed in the results of a recent EU poll that found that young people overwhelmingly believe the “gap between the rich and poor is widening,” and that “banks and money rule the world.” More than half of those polled said they would join a “large scale uprising.”

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) of Germany is the only political party running in the upcoming federal election on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program in opposition to war, inequality and the attack on democratic rights. It seeks to warn the working class of the enormous dangers it confronts and prepare for the struggles ahead.



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