

German police stand by as neo-Nazis give Hitler salute at “rock against foreigners” concert

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One of the largest neo-Nazi gatherings in the last decade took place in the small town of Themar in the German state of Thuringia last Saturday. More than 6,000 right-wing extremists travelled from across Europe to take part in the “Rock against foreign infiltration” festival.

The right-wing extremists obviously felt emboldened by the campaign waged by the major political parties in Germany against left-wing protesters following the G20 summit in Hamburg. It was, after all, Heiko Mas, the Social Democrat Justice Minister, who issued a call for a “Rock against the left” concert.

While the police acted brutally against peaceful demonstrators at G20 and violently broke up authorised gatherings, they acted as security forces for the attendees of the neo-Nazi festival. Even when the right-wing extremists began committing widespread acts of criminality, and used the Nazi salute and “Sieg Heil” greeting, the police refused to disperse the gathering and arrest the perpetrators.

The neo-Nazis acted extremely aggressively and made no secret of their political outlook from the outset. *Die Zeit* reported on one attendee who arrived at the event with an open jacket revealing a T-shirt with a swastika printed on it. Other participants wore T-shirts including “National Socialist” and “I love HTLR.” This has been documented by hundreds of sources online. Journalists were threatened and spat on.

Bands who performed included Stahlgewitter, who sing about the Wehrmacht in their songs and chant “88,” a code which means “Heil Hitler” in neo-Nazi circles. The music was interrupted by speeches from representatives of the neo-Nazi NPD, Pegida, and many more right-wing extremist organisations.

There are only a few pictures from inside the grounds, which could not be seen as they were sealed off by construction barriers. Journalists reported that they could hear the singer of the right-wing extremist band “Blutzeugen” repeatedly shouting “Sieg Heil” from the stage and that similar slogans were taken up by the crowd.

One of the few short videos of the event revealed dozens of neo-Nazis performing the Nazi salute and shouting “Sieg Heil.” The video only showed a small part of the crowd, creating the impression that hundreds of Nazis raised their arms. The video was deleted shortly afterwards by its author, but had already been shared across social media.

The police initially asserted on Sunday evening that they had been unaware of these scenes. But given the absurdity of this claim, they were forced on Monday to acknowledge that they were aware that symbols in violation of the constitution, whose use is a criminal offense, were displayed. Nonetheless, the police stated that dispersing the gathering would have been disproportionate because the right to freedom of assembly had to be protected.

One week after the brutal police crackdown on peaceful anti-G20 protesters, these claims are thoroughly hypocritical. In Hamburg, a tent camp of left-wing G20 counter-demonstrators was violently broken up by the police. Several peaceful protesters were attacked with water cannon and tear gas. But when neo-Nazis gather to glorify Hitler and give the Nazi salute, which is illegal under German law, their “basic right to freedom of assembly” is enforced by the police!

In Themar, in spite of the widespread criminal action

and glorification of Hitler by the 6,000 neo-Nazis, the police issued only 43 criminal charges, including for the use of symbols belonging to constitutionally outlawed organisations, threats, grievous bodily harm and breaches of the law on bearing arms.

The police effectively protected the neo-Nazi hordes. A photo widely shared on social media shows a police officer engaging in a friendly manner with one of the right-wing extremist music groups. The police insisted in a press release that the picture did not depict a handshake. But the picture speaks for itself.

In addition, Vice reported that the police discussed the G20 protests with the neo-Nazis. Two neo-Nazis approached a group of officers and one asked, “And, were you in Hamburg?” When the officers nodded, the neo-Nazi said, “Shit, wasn’t it? If only you had intervened a bit more firmly.”

The red-red-green government in Thuringia was responsible for the police operation in Themar. It was well known for months that thousands of neo-Nazis would come to the event and the government led by Left Party Minister President Bodo Ramelow obviously decided to protect the fascist mob.

Thuringia’s Interior Minister Holger Poppenhäger thanked the police for their trouble-free operation, declaring, “The police’s plan worked wonderfully, the police had the situation under control at all times. Especially given the heavy operational burdens in the wake of the G20 summit, my special thanks goes to the Thuringia police and those units supporting them from other states.”

Ramelow made no criticism of the police operation. Instead, he called for the restriction of freedom of assembly so that “in the future state officials and approval authorities, and subsequently the courts taking the decisions no longer put this kind of thing down to freedom of opinion.”

Such a measure would not be directed against the neo-Nazis, who were able to commit widespread criminal offences under the noses of Thuringia’s police, but against left-wing protesters. It is no accident that the Ramelow government deployed 450 officers to Hamburg to attack the basic rights of demonstrators.

The fact that the same police officers were subsequently tasked with defending the rights of the neo-Nazis must be taken as a serious warning. All of the bourgeois parties, from the SPD to the Left Party,

are ready to strengthen the state and mobilise the fascist-minded dregs of society to suppress growing popular opposition to their right-wing policies.



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