

Germany: Extent of ‘left-wing violence’ at G20 summit was wildly exaggerated

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22 July 2017

Following the G20 summit in Hamburg an unprecedented campaign has taken place against what has been described as a “new quality of left-wing violence.” The Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader and its leading election candidate, Martin Schulz, spoke of “attempted murder” in Hamburg, while Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel (also SPD) went so far as to describe those taking part in riots as “terrorists.”

One and a half weeks after the clashes between protesters and police during the summit, it has become clear that police, leading politicians and the media systematically exaggerated the scale of what took place and invented a number of incidents.

The facts have only emerged in drip-feed, but now make clear that the damage caused and the plundering which took place was comparable to what occurred following clashes in the city on the first of May. In particular, it is clear there were no severe attacks on civilians by protesters, despite assertions to the contrary.

The claims of “a new quality of violence” were mainly based on the clashes that took place in the Schanzenviertel suburb of the city on the evening of the July 7. Police claimed that they had not been able to enter the neighbourhood because they confronted life-threatening danger. The alleged threat came from violent anarchist protesters who had taken to the roofs in order to attack police with paving stones and Molotov cocktails.

In fact, there is no proof to back up such horror stories. Speaking to the press, police chief Hartmut Dudde, in charge of the operation, presented a pixelated video from a thermal imaging camera recorded by a police helicopter just before midnight. It allegedly shows a man on a house roof throwing a luminous object down onto the street. Nothing else happens.

According to Dudde, the object was a Molotov cocktail that failed to explode on impact. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* recorded someone who was present on the street at the same time who could not recall seeing a failed Molotov cocktail. The camera recording was so fuzzy it was impossible to say whether the object in question was an incendiary device or not, although the recording was made at a time when the police had long since stormed the allegedly inaccessible neighbourhood.

In addition there is no evidence of the paving slabs and Molotov cocktails supposed to have been carried onto the roofs by the alleged rioters, although the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* noted the police had been given clear instructions to secure such evidence. Up to now there exists no report on these alleged criminal acts, nor are there any photos, the newspaper writes. The NDR news channel cites local residents who state that onlookers had simply taken to the rooftops in order to observe what was taking place on the streets.

Last week, 15 owners of shops from the area affected published a statement in which they sharply rejected the police version of events. “It was drunken youth we saw on scaffolding throwing bottles—it makes no sense to talk about a planned ‘ambush’ and a threat to the life and limb of police,” the text reads. “As local residents, we were more afraid of the armed special units targeting our neighbours with machine guns than the drunken idiots who charged around here yesterday.”

Meanwhile, a number of reports based on sources inside the Hamburg police force maintain that the anarchists had carried out an “effective counter-operation” and eliminated decisive evidence. This claim is absurd. Imagine that a special commando unit (SEK), equipped with heavy armament, storms a house while rioters on the roof have nothing better to do than

transport heavy paving stones, which no one can find later!

This preposterous notion also contradicts SEK commandant Sven Mewes' statement in an interview with *Spiegel Online*. Mewes stated that a total of 13 people were arrested during the storming of the houses and "there was no resistance given." Afterwards the neighbourhood was quiet, with no rioters or stone throwers to be found.

This statement also contradicts police claims that it had been impossible to regain control of the neighbourhood for several hours, as well as the assertion by Hamburg Interior Minister Andy Grote (SPD) that the persons on the roofs were part of an "armed ambush."

The 13 detained suspects have all since been released from custody. The police did not apply for arrest warrants against any of those arrested. A court spokesman told the *Hamburger Abendblatt* that the police had been unable to pin a criminal offence on any of those arrested.

Word of the allegedly horrendous number of police officers injured has also largely disappeared into thin air. Shortly after the G20 summit, the figure of 476 injured policemen was circulated. It is now clear that this number has been enormously exaggerated to fuel the fiction of massive left-wing violence.

Hamburg police officer Holger Vehren indicated that this total refers to the entire period of the police operation in the city—from June 22 to July 10—i.e., almost three weeks. In the phase of the police operation during the summit, from July 6 to 9, 231 police were reported to have suffered injuries, according to the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior.

According to the Hamburg police, however, the number of "injured" includes all casualties incurred during the G20 operation. Such "injuries" included dehydration, circulatory problems and similar illnesses due to the summer temperatures. According to *Spiegel Online*, just two police officers were reported as having suffered serious injuries and only 21 police officers were not fully fit for work after reporting sick.

The fiction of excessive left-wing violence against allegedly prudent and unsuspecting policemen finally explodes when one takes into account the number of injured civilians. Referring to data from hospitals in Hamburg, the *taz* newspaper reports that a total of 189

people with "injuries typical for those resulting from demonstrations" were hospitalised; i.e., they had to remain in hospital after initial medical treatment. Injuries suffered included broken bones, bruises, wounds or cuts. The *taz* quoted a spokesman for the Asklepios-Kliniken who said that the list included "everything that could be broken—knees, shoulder, pelvic ring, ribs, wrists."

Just how many people were injured by police will probably never be known. During the demonstrations, many of the casualties were already treated by paramedics, while others visited hospitals and doctors outside Hamburg. But even the number of injured at hospitals in Hamburg suggests that the total exceeds that of injured policemen many times over.

Against this background there is a growing list of criminal charges being filed against police officers. *Die Welt* reported last Friday that a total of 35 preliminary investigations were taking place against policemen, with 27 accused of bodily injury. A total of 44 criminal complaints had been received, Hamburg Attorney General Nana Frombach stated. In some cases it was still necessary to examine whether a number of the charges were related to the same incident.

All the facts now known confirm that politicians and the media have launched a systematic campaign of disinformation based on lies and exaggerations in order to justify the brutal police operation against the G20 protesters. Above all, however, the aim was to shift the entire political climate to the right a few weeks before the beginning of the federal election campaign, and to ensure that the necessity for the build-up of suppressive police and security forces takes centre stage.



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