

The myth of “left-wing” violence at the G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany

Justus Leicht
23 August 2017

More than a month after the clashes on the periphery of the G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany, the official portrayal of events by the police, media and political establishment follows a definite pattern.

According to this narrative, Hamburg experienced an unprecedented outbreak of “left-wing violence,” which the police could ward off only using military means. However, it has become clear that the violence stemmed predominantly from the security forces, and that many of the acts described in the official narrative were either extremely exaggerated or completely invented.

For example, no evidence has been found to support the claim that protesters sought to throw stones and Molotov cocktails from rooftops. Even after intensive searches and forensic investigation, the police have not been able to present any such objects. Despite comprehensive video surveillance, they have not been able to definitively document their use. In fact, many of those who were on roofs or scaffolding were found to be film crews or curious onlookers.

An alleged “armed ambush” was cited to justify the use of heavily armed special forces, who deployed armoured vehicles, shotguns and assault rifles.

Because of the disturbances before and during the G20 summit, about 160 investigations are underway and 32 suspects are being held in custody. A clash on Rondenbarg Street in the Altona district stands out prominently. It is the subject of at least 59 investigations, resulting in 13 protesters being taken into custody. At least four of them are still in prison, three men and one woman from Italy.

In the very restrained words of the daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, a police video of the event—which has not been released but has now been seen by the newspaper and broadcaster NDR’s programme “Panorama”—throws

“doubt on the previous official presentation by the authorities”.

The footage shows a slow-moving group of demonstrators and a group of police officers in protective equipment. When the two groups are still about 50 metres apart, three “Bengalos” (Bengali flares) fly onto the empty street. All of them land far away from the police officers. The distant bang of a firecracker can be heard.

Although this cannot be construed as an assault, the police unit takes it as the opportunity to attack the demonstrators. As they flee, the protesters are encircled and fired upon from behind with a water cannon. In running away from the police, 14 protesters were injured, some seriously, when they stumbled over a railing and fell 2 metres to the ground.

Immediately following this operation, the deputy commander of the police unit involved gave a completely different account in a “witness statement of the facts”, which the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* has seen.

“When the crowd was about 50 metres in front of us, we came massively and purposefully under fire from bottles, firecrackers and bengalos,” he wrote. “Stones hit the police officers and the vehicles.” Only the “protective equipment” prevented police officers from being injured. “To ward off the current attacks, the unit ran towards the crowd and the hail of stones continued,” the police report adds.

The police videos show that not a word of this is true.

The State Criminal Investigation Department evaluated the videos in the evening that same day. The next day, the Saturday of the summit, the duty analyst reported to her superiors how little violence on the part of the demonstrators could be seen on the recordings, and that therefore the statement of the deputy unit commander was in doubt.

Even so, contrary to their better knowledge, police officials repeated for weeks that there had been a “massive hail of stones, bottles and pyrotechnics”.

Meanwhile, the Hamburg criminal justice system is proceeding with draconian harshness. For example, 18-year-old Italian worker Fabio V, with no previous criminal record, has been held in custody for more than four weeks. The courts have refused his release, citing crassly arbitrary grounds.

According to the daily *taz*, the detention order of the Hamburg Higher Regional Court states that “personal acts of violence cannot be attributed to the accused according to the current state of the investigation.”

Instead, the court reports that the 18-year-old is a member of the anarchist scene and is responsible for all the riots: “The accused had caused the civil war-like conditions,” the court writes.

In fact, his arrest had already taken place before the serious disturbances on Friday evening involving the Black Block. The court did not undertake its own analysis of the existing police videos, but relied on statements from the police.

As evidence of his membership in anarchist groups, the court cites the clothes worn by the young man arrested: a black Gore-Tex jacket, a black-white scarf and dark sneakers. The court also holds against the accused the fact that on the left-wing Indymedia website there is a call to send the 18-year-old and all other G20 prisoners solidarity messages.

Even before a trial has been held, the Higher Regional Court judges wrote that the expected prison sentence “cannot be suspended”, according to a report in *Die Welt* newspaper. “Human dignity, the right to physical integrity and to property” are clearly “without any meaning” for the prisoner, according to the judges.

Furthermore, the Senate of the Higher Regional Court writes that the “discernible ruthless and deeply-founded propensity to violence” were of particular importance. The young man had participated in “the most severe riots”, which illustrates a “character attitude justifying the assumption of guilt”. Later, the Higher Regional Court Senate speaks of the “malicious inclinations” of the accused, and establishes “considerable educational deficiencies, which cause the risk of further criminal offences without the extensive education of the perpetrator”.

Fabio V. himself has not spoken. His Hamburg

lawyer, Gabriele Heinecke, has lodged a constitutional appeal.

The fact that this young worker who has not shown any previous involvement in violent acts has been demonised, imprisoned, and threatened with a long term of imprisonment for allegedly belonging to the “left scene”, without any trial and a possibility to defend himself, is a serious warning.

The military rearming of Germany and the pursuit of a great-power role cannot be reconciled with democracy. The ruling class is determined to brutally suppress any political resistance.

The clashes on the periphery of the G20 summit serve as a pretext for speeding up the provision of wider powers to the security forces and a hysterical campaign against “left-wing extremism” by the political establishment and the media.

At the same time, all evidence of the massive, disproportionate use of police violence has been swept under the carpet, especially by the Social Democratic Party (SPD). There was no police violence, the concept alone was impermissible and merely left-wing extremist propaganda, said Hamburg’s mayor Olaf Scholz (SPD). The police were “heroes”, he claimed, and their actions completely justified.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact