

German police publicly name and shame G20 protesters

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Five months after protests in the German city of Hamburg against the G20 summit, the police and state prosecutors have published pictures of hundreds of demonstrators online. In a co-ordinated campaign with the right-wing *Bild* newspaper, they are calling on members of the public to denounce those pictured. The initiative is not only disproportionate, but unlawful. Nothing comparable has taken place since the founding of the German Federal Republic.

“Pictures of criminals are generally only published if they have been accused of committing capital offences, such as murder, grievous bodily harm or armed robbery,” commented the weekly news magazine *Die Zeit*. The last time state prosecutors publicly sought alleged left-wing motivated criminals was during the period of the Red Army Faction, whose members murdered representatives of the state and big business.

Heribert Prantl, a jurist and head of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*’s internal affairs desk, wrote, “This is unlawful, and it remains unlawful even if the investigation is successful in one or another case. Will future investigations really consist of the police in cooperation with the *Bild* newspaper hunting people down? This is not solving crime, but a scandal.”

If the Hamburg case becomes the norm, any participant in a left-wing protest must reckon with being placed in the stocks by the police and denounced in front of their neighbours, work colleagues and employers as a potential criminal.

This does not only do away with individual rights, such as the right to privacy and the presumption of innocence, but also basic democratic rights such as the rights to protest and express one’s opinion freely. Only dictatorships or semi-dictatorial regimes like Turkey have raised the threat of treating people like hardened criminals merely for participating in a protest.

In this particular case, the police are seeking information on 104 people accused of participating in violent clashes and looting. But the hundred photos and video segments they have published feature “very, very many people,” as Prantl put it in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. “Are they all really criminals? No one knows, the police merely suspect it; they conclude it from the spatial context, from the proximity to a criminal incident.” The evidence, according to *Die Zeit*, “is often scant.”

From the outset, the G20 summit served to launch a public campaign against “left-wing extremism,” and construct a police state. Isolated incidents of violence, for which police and intelligence agency agents were often responsible, were deliberately exaggerated and exploited so as to criminalise all opposition to the ruling elite or capitalism.

This began with the decision to hold a gathering of the most powerful heads of government in the world, against which strong protests have occurred over recent years, in the middle of a major city and in the immediate proximity of the Schanzen quarter, a stronghold of anarchist groups.

A huge police operation was assembled for the summit, which cracked down brutally against peaceful demonstrators, intentionally dispensed with proven methods of de-escalation and watched for hours as several businesses were looted. They claimed that the police could not intervene due to an alleged ambush.

Almost everything spread by the police and media at the time was subsequently exposed as lies. Although a special “Black Bloc” commission has been searching for evidence for five months with the help of 163 officials, only a handful of charges have been brought to date. Those affected have been mainly foreign demonstrators, who due to an alleged “flight risk” were

held in investigative custody following the summit.

An 18-year-old Italian worker, Fabio V., was held in custody for four months even though, according to the criminal justice authorities, there was no evidence he had committed an individual act of violence. He did not even throw a stone. He was accused of being “jointly responsible for creating the civil war-like conditions” on the basis that at the time he was arrested he was part of the black bloc.

His trial, which is to conclude early next year, is seen as a test case. “If the now 19-year-old is convicted of a severe breach of the peace, many demonstrators are sure to be receiving post from the state prosecutor in the coming months. By contrast, if he is acquitted, other charges are likely to collapse,” wrote *Die Zeit*.

The judiciary in Hamburg has stood out for its draconian ruthlessness in the few trials that have taken place thus far. In the first trial held at the end of August, the court sentenced a 21-year-old from the Netherlands without any criminal history to two years and seven months in custody because he allegedly threw two glass bottles at a police officer and resisted arrest. The evidence for this: the statements of the two police officers.

By contrast, the judiciary is taking no action against the police in spite of well-documented incidences of brutality. Although more than a hundred police officers are suspected of inflicting bodily harm in the course of their duties, denial of freedom or duress, the authorities have not filed a single charge.

Police officers being investigated are permitted to read the witness statements of their colleagues. This gives them the opportunity to ensure their narrative fits with that of their fellow officers. Matthias Wisbar from the Republican Lawyers’ Association described this as a “special service” only available to police witnesses.

On the other hand, the intimidation and pursuit of left-wing individuals and organisations continue to spread. At the end of August, the interior minister banned the left-wing website linksunten.indymedia. On September 4, the police carried out raids in many parts of the country involving large numbers of officers. With the public search for hundreds of people, the exploitation of the G20 summit for the establishment of a police state has assumed new dimensions.

This can only be understood in the context of intensifying global and social tensions. The ruling class

is preparing a major programme of militarism in its foreign policy and a violent clampdown on any social and political opposition domestically.

This is also the reason for the difficulties in forming a new government. The call for an end to “Merkelism” (Spiegel) is growing ever louder. Merkel, notwithstanding her right-wing policies in the European Union and Germany, is increasingly seen as a figure of balance and compromise. But in the view of the sections of the economic and political elite who call the shots, the time for this approach is past. They want a government that asserts itself on the global stage as a great power and imposes itself ruthlessly at home.

The Social Democrats are playing a leading role in this. It is significant that the police state offensive has been launched in Hamburg, which together with Bremen is the only federal state where the SPD still governs in a two-party alliance with the Greens. Hamburg Mayor Olaf Scholz is among the favourites to replace the hard-pressed SPD leader Martin Schulz. Like Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, he is one of the advocates for militarism and a strong state.



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