

# Munich: 40,000 demonstrate against new police law

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15 May 2018

Last Thursday, more than 40,000 people demonstrated in Munich against the new Bavarian Police Law (PAG). Organizers of the demonstration and the city administration had expected about 7,000 participants, but more and more people are no longer prepared to tolerate the construction of a police state and unrelenting attacks on basic democratic rights.

Thousands have already taken to the streets in recent weeks in the Bavarian cities of Nuremberg, Erlangen and Regensburg, to demonstrate against the extension of police powers and the assault on civil liberties.

Due to the high number of protesters, the planned starting rally at Munich's Marienplatz had to be cancelled and the city centre was closed to traffic. Participants travelled from all over Bavaria and also came from other German states. Especially prominent in the protest in the Bavarian state capital were young people. The demonstration was organised by the so-called "noPAG" alliance, which includes political parties, trade unions, lawyers associations, the Bavarian Association of Journalists and a number of other organisations.

The law introduced by the conservative Christian Social Union (CSU) is due to be adopted on Tuesday in the Bavarian state parliament, despite much criticism of its provisions. The Society for Freedom (GFF) and a former federal interior minister, Gerhart Baum (FDP), plan to lodge constitutional lawsuits against the new law.

Lawyers refer to the law as the toughest piece of German police legislation since 1945. "The character of the police will change completely, we will see police with powers that have not existed since 1945," was the conclusion drawn by the renowned constitutional lawyer Hartmut Wächter.

The PAG is indeed unprecedented in Germany's

history since the fall of the Nazi regime. The powers of the police are to be massively expanded, and they will also be empowered to carry out extensive surveillance and intelligence operations.

Until now the police could only carry out measures to prevent crime if they had indications of a "concrete danger"—now an "imminent danger" is enough. Previously the police needed concrete evidence or even a legal warrant in order to monitor a person or a group and proceed against them. According to the new law, mere suspicion is sufficient.

The PAG enables the police to conduct nationwide surveillance without any significant restrictions. Police can film demonstrations even if criminal offences are not expected. They can take "overview photos" and compare them with existing files. The law permits the use of "systems for the automatic recognition and evaluation of patterns related to objects and the behaviour of persons."

In future, police officers will wear bodycams on their uniforms which will run continuously. A legal regulation for the preservation of recordings does not exist, meaning the tapes can be stored and used as long as desired.

This is aimed at creating the legal basis for facial recognition. As is already the case in Berlin, facial recognition programs in public spaces are also on the agenda for Bavaria.

The surveillance of private data on computers is in future to be permitted for "preventive" purposes and without concrete suspicion of a possible offence, using so-called Trojan software. The technology can also be used to collect and store remote data, i.e., when the data is stored in the "cloud." Data can also be manipulated or deleted.

Police will also be able to confiscate parcels and

letters without judicial authorisation, once again in the case of so-called “imminent danger.” This completely eliminates existing provisions regarding postal secrecy. At the same time, the police can interfere with telecommunications and “interrupt or stop communication links through the use of technical means,” without any evidence pointing to a criminal offence.

A central element of the PAG is cooperation by police with other state agencies. In future, personal data can be transmitted at any time to the secret services in Germany and also other countries—once again in the absence of any concrete evidence of a crime.

The police will be able to carry out their own intelligence operations, working with undercover investigators using false identities, again without a court order. Such agents can then spy on discussions in social networks or in the meetings of political groups.

The PAG is the latest stage in a massive domestic rearmament program. In July last year, the state government introduced so-called “infinity custody,” according to which suspects can be detained for up to three months, after which a judge must again decide whether to extend his sentence. There is no longer any maximum time limit. An actual crime does not have to have been committed.

The state government reacted with open contempt for the “noPAG” participants and their right to demonstrate. Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann (CSU) accused critics of the PAG of propagating “lying propaganda” and accused them of “misleading inexperienced people.” Government politicians reaffirmed their determination to enforce the law in all circumstances, regardless of the broad opposition.

The “noPAG” demonstration was joined by the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens, the Left Party and even the Free Democrats (FDP), who are all looking for votes in the upcoming Bavarian state election. In fact, these parties are involved in adopting similar legislation at a federal level and in those states where they rule. The Bavarian Police Law serves as a role model.

The Bavarian PAG was drafted under the leadership of the former state premier Horst Seehofer (CSU), who now leads the Interior and Home Office in the grand coalition government. Seehofer is a militant advocate of a “strong state” and has the full support of the SPD.

Following Seehofer’s inauguration as interior minister at the end of March, Eva Högl declared in the Bundestag, on behalf of the SPD parliamentary group: “Mr. Seehofer, we look forward to working with you.” Together “with the federal states” the SPD sought to “better equip the police, the judiciary and the security authorities.”

In the state of Saxony, where the SPD governs together with the CDU, the draft of a police law similar to that in Bavaria already exists. And in North Rhine-Westphalia, where an alliance of CDU and FDP heads the state government, a similar draft is to be decided upon. The Left Party also supports the demand for more police.

The drive to build a police state has its roots in growing social contradictions and the return to militarism in Germany. Such an agenda is incompatible with democracy. The ruling class is again preparing to suppress the class struggle and political resistance by force.



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