

Fifteen thousand protest throughout Germany against war, police repression and the fascist right

Our reporters
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Over the weekend more than 15,000 people protested in different German cities against the neo-Nazi right, police repression, war and social inequality.

The largest protest came Saturday, as 10,000 people demonstrated in Hanover against the Lower Saxony Police Law (NPOG). In addition to parties and civic organisations, the protest was supported by a number of football fan groups and smaller initiatives. Many of the demonstrators not only opposed the police law, but also the increasing lurch to the right in politics, militarism and growing social inequality.

The issue at the heart of the protest was the new police law. As in other German states, the powers of the security authorities are to be massively expanded and basic civil rights curtailed in Lower Saxony with the NPOG.

In the future, mere suspicion of an offence is sufficient to allow the police to resort to drastic measures. For example, in cases of “serious organised violence” or terrorist offences, police can force suspects to wear electronic ankle cuffs, thereby overriding the basic principle of innocent until proved guilty. Video surveillance in public spaces may be used under certain conditions even in cases of suspicion of “non-negligent misdemeanours.” The interception of telephone calls, emails and chat messages is also to be massively expanded and can be carried out at any time. For this purpose, so-called “State Trojans,” malware developed for the police, are to be used.

The Lower Saxony Interior Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) justified the new law as needed for the “deterrence of Islamic-motivated terrorism.” In fact, the new police laws in Lower Saxony, Bavaria and other states are not aimed against terrorism. These methods of police-state repression will be used against all opposition. As is the case at a federal level, a coalition of the CDU and SPD

governs in Lower Saxony. At both levels, the coalition is advancing a right-wing program of militarism, social cuts and incitement directed against refugees.

The large demonstration in Hanover shows that these policies are rejected by the population. Many protesters are well aware of the connection between the despised policies of war and social cuts and the police law. “Combatting the shift to the right means rejecting the police law,” one large banner read. “It’s all about repressing even further those social layers who already have no access to education and wealth,” one participant declared. “The political class in this country is preparing for more unrest because of growing social problems, and it’s introducing the judicial measures to tackle it,” another said. “They are preparing for major social conflicts.”

Jens, 37 years old and currently unemployed, came to the Hanover demonstration from the city of Wolfsburg. He is outraged by increasing police surveillance. “The possibilities to monitor emails and telephone calls are limitless,” he explained. Everyone will be a suspect in future, regardless of whether he or she actually committed a crime.

Jens was particularly worried about the strengthening of police powers against the background of militarisation. “More and more money is being put into the German army,” he said, adding that he sees a clear lurch to the right in official politics. “The CDU, SPD and AfD all work together to pass such laws,” he said.

The return of German militarism, which is being pushed forward by all of the establishment parties, is provoking massive opposition. “The proposal by von der Leyen [German defence minister] to increase the military budget to 2 percent [of GDP], is unacceptable. It has not been agreed upon by the population,” said one young protester. “This is not democratic and we have to take to the

streets.” Another demonstrator explained that the 2 percent was not necessary for defence and would be used instead for offensive measures, adding, “but that should not and cannot be the goal of Germany.”

Many posters recalled the era of Nazism. A young protester said she was scared. “Especially if you imagine that the AfD getting bigger, comes to power and then has these opportunities to work with the police,” she said. “That’s when I recall the rise of the Nazi regime.”

Adnan, who came to Germany from Turkey many years ago, drew attention to the close links between the police and the far right. “I am not afraid of the alleged terror, but rather of the police,” he said. Referring to the recent events in Chemnitz, he continued, “A few Nazis can hunt down foreigners and the police does nothing.”

Asked about the fact that Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, the Saxony Premier Kretschmer and secret service chief Maassen openly support the brown mob, Adnan said he placed no confidence in “these right-wing people.” He knew that the majority of ordinary people did not think that way.

Saskia, a student from Hanover, also had no illusions in the established parties. Asked about the role of the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party, she thought it was “brazen” that their youth organisations appeared on the demo as if they were opposed to these laws. “These parties are almost indistinguishable in their politics,” she said. Saskia thought that appeals directed to the parliament in Lower Saxony and the parties represented in it were just “nonsense.”

In Munich, about 3,000 people demonstrated on Saturday at Marienplatz against a rally of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). The deputy AfD leader, Beatrix von Storch, tried to hold a rally as part of the party’s campaign for the impending state election in Bavaria, but the 120 AfD supporters faced at least 25 times as many counterdemonstrators.

Storch’s speech at the AfD rally was drowned out by a sea of cat-calls and booing. Demonstrators shouted “Nazis out,” “Nobody needs the AfD” and “There is no right to spread Nazi propaganda.” The AfD was forced to end its meeting an hour earlier than planned.

The protest once again demonstrated the massive opposition to right-wing extremism and fascism among workers and youth. Last Monday, around 70,000 people gathered in Chemnitz for a “Rock against the right-wing” concert under the motto “We are more.” Tens of thousands of people also took to the streets of Hamburg, Berlin and other cities over the past two weeks to express

their anger and horror at the events in Chemnitz and the provocative activities of the mob of would-be brownshirts.

In Munich, protesters included workers, youth and many families with children. Tourists visiting the Bavarian capital also stopped and declared their support when they realised a protest was being held against the far right.

Self-made signs proclaimed, “Munich is colourful” and “No room for agitators.” Parallels were repeatedly drawn to the Nazi reign of terror. “To vote for the AfD invokes 1933” or “Never again” could be read on many placards. “We should not fight the refugees, but rather that which forces them to flee,” one young participant said. “Asylum seekers should not be played off against those receiving Hartz IV social payments. In a fairer society, there would be enough for both,” another explained.

When Storch arrived in Dachau on Sunday for a meeting, she was met by 2,500 demonstrators. The city with 40,000 inhabitants is notorious around the world as the location of a concentration camp from 1933 to 1945.

One of the speakers at the counterdemonstration was Ernst Grube, who was incarcerated in a concentration camp by the Nazis for being a “half Jew” and son of a Communist Party member. He is still being spied upon by the German secret service today. Grube warned: “AfD supporters are more and more unabashedly propagandising their contempt for human beings.” He blamed this on the representatives of all of the established parties: “The politicians intensify this hostile climate and in this rotting atmosphere the mob become increasingly aggressive.”

Members and supporters of the SGP (Sozialistischer Gleichheitspartei, Socialist Equality Party) distributed leaflets headlined “The fight against right-wing terror requires a socialist perspective” at the demonstration in Munich. The leaflet of the SGP explains the political connection between the aggressive activities of the right-wing extremists, the return of German militarism and the establishment of a police state. It was read by many with great interest. “The only social force that can counter this development and stop the right is the international working class,” the leaflet said.



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