40,000 people protest in Munich, Germany against racism and police state laws

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On the day marking the reunification of Germany, 40,000 people demonstrated in the Bavarian capital against racism and the new Police Task Law (PAG) with which the CSU state government plans to curtail civil rights and massively extend the powers of the security forces. This latest protest was the fourth major demonstration in Munich in recent months.

The protest was carried out under the slogan: “Now it's up to you! - Together against a policy of fear.” The demonstration was called by the Alliance against the Bavarian Police Task Force (noPAG) and the organizers of the #outraged demonstration, which took place in July this year.

Among the participants were various civil rights associations and refugee workers. As was the case with previous demonstrations, significantly more people participated than organizers and police had expected. Many school pupils and students, as well as families were among those present. Home-made posters bore statements directed against the far right AfD and the right-wing policy of the Bavarian state government led by the Christian Social Union (CSU). The CSU has long since adopted the policies of the AfD, implementing a strict deportation policy and setting up so-called anchor centres to incarcerate migrants. Many expressed their disquiet at the far-reaching powers of the police resulting from the new PAG.

In fact, the PAG is a major step towards a police state. Previously the police could act if they had evidence of a “concrete danger.” But now on the basis of so-called imminent” danger “suspects” can be subjected to covert investigations, wiretapping, or have their computers searched. The law regulating the secrecy of post has also been suspended, allowing the police to search letters and parcels on mere suspicion.

As early as July 2017, the state government introduced a new preventive detention regime. Accordingly, suspects can be detained for up to three months, after which a judge must decide whether detention is to be extended. There is no longer a maximum period of detention and no crime need be committed.

The Bavarian state government has made no secret of its contempt for democratic rights. Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann (CSU) defended the PAG and referred to the protest in a press release as a “whipping up of vile sentiments.” He told demonstrators they were making common cause with left-wing extremists - the state government’s designation for anyone who rejects their right-wing politics. “Everyone has the right to demonstrate. But there were very many leftists on the march,” complained Bavarian Prime Minister Markus Söder on Thursday on Bayerischer Rundfunk.

The mass demonstration, which received little coverage in the media, underlined that the majority of the population rejects racism, militarism and police state rearmament. The official “opposition,” consisting of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Left Party and the Greens, is far removed from the concerns of the protesters. They feigned support for the demonstrators in speeches at the closing rally and voiced their opposition to the PAG, but all of these parties have for some time carried out virtually the same policies when they enter a state or federal government.

At the federal level, the SPD and the conservative Union (Christian Democratic Union and CSU) form a grand coalition in which the CSU sets the tone with regard to refugee policy. With the decision to continue the grand coalition, the SPD made the AfD the head of the country’s official opposition and all of the parties work closely together with the AfD on a number of key parliamentary committees.

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The participation of Natasha Kohnen in the demonstration was a desperate attempt to win votes. Kohnen is the leading candidate of the SPD in the state election due to take place in Bavaria in just over a week, but the SPD is widely despised because of its right-wing politics. The latest polls place the Social Democrats at just 11 percent.

As for the Bavarian Greens, there is a growing chorus campaigning for a possible coalition with the CSU after the elections. Local councilor Wolfgang Rzehak is one of many Green politicians who consider such a coalition to be "possible." Both parties defend "conservative values" and there are "many reasonable people" in the CSU, he said.

In the neighbouring state of Baden-Württemberg, a CDU-Green Party coalition has been in power since 2016. BW Premier Winfried Kretschmann (Green Party) also considers a coalition of his party with the CSU in Bavaria to be possible. The Bavarian Greens were not about to officially issue a statement in favour of a coalition with the CSU before the state election, but they did not want to remain in opposition and would rather co-govern, Kretschmann said on Tuesday in Stuttgart.

The former Left Party leader Gregor Gysi has intervened in the Bavarian election campaign to support Left Party candidate Ates Gürpinar. The Left Party shares the line of the Union parties when it comes to beefing up the state apparatus and agitating against refugees. In Brandenburg, the SPD-Left Party state government plans to massively strengthen local police laws this year, adopting in large measure the Bavarian PAG. The Left Party has also advocated allowing the police unlimited access to messages from messenger services. As in Bavaria, police will be equipped with body cameras to film "suspects."

In addition, the government plans to make extensive online searches on a "preventive" basis. i.e., before any offence has been committed, while increasing the number of police and intelligence services for undercover investigations. In addition, electronic ankle bracelets are to be introduced.

With regard to refugee policy, the Left Party has also adopted the policy of the extreme right. After a dispute in a club in Frankfurt (Oder), Left Party Mayor Rene Wilke initiated an order for the deportation of seven refugees from Syria, Pakistan and Palestine. His move was hailed by the AfD. The Brandenburg state chairman, Andreas Kalbitz, who is aligned with the ultra-right wing of the AfD, declared: "We feel confirmed in our demands."

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