

Tens of thousands demonstrate in Dresden, Germany, against the rise of the far-right

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A week prior to elections in the German states of Saxony and Brandenburg, tens of thousands marched through Dresden on Saturday to protest the rise of the far-right. With around 35,000 participants, it was one of the largest demonstrations in Saxony's state capital since the collapse of East Germany. The protest expressed the widespread opposition among the population to the sharp shift of the political establishment to the right.

The demonstration was called by the #unteilbar (indivisible) alliance, which includes hundreds of organisations. Many participants not only attended to protest against the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD), but also to express their outrage towards the federal government's right-wing policies. Issues raised included the attacks on refugees, drownings in the Mediterranean, attacks on democratic rights, and the poor conditions in the healthcare, elderly care, housing and education sectors.

"I'm so shocked about it. That I am experiencing this all over again, how everything is coming back," said Beate, who participated with her group Grandmothers Against the Right. She was born immediately after the war and grew up amidst the chaos left behind by World War II and the Nazis. She is now taking to the streets to ensure that her grandchildren don't have to live through the same horrors.

Younger participants also addressed questions of historical experience. Two young students from Dresden spoke about their concern over the strengthening of the AfD. They drew parallels to the 1930s. "I think old structures are emerging that we saw under Hitler. I'm very worried that it's going in that direction, such as with the xenophobia," said one student.

Many members of refugee support organisations and

voluntary organisations campaigning against the far right, for more democracy, international collaboration and tolerance took part in the demonstration. The demonstration included members of Mission Lifeline, an organisation founded in Dresden that has sent rescue ships to the Mediterranean.

Melanie, 28, told the WSWs about her experiences and impressions during her time in the Mediterranean. She explained how her ship was docked in Malta for maintenance and constantly received emergency calls. "It was then that I realised for the first time what Europe really means. We're sitting in a fortress and nobody comes in," she said.

She angrily demanded, "Nobody should be privileged because of where they were born. There has to be equality." She said that the AfD was not the only danger and pointed to the general shift of politics to the right, such as in Italy and the EU.

The Saxony Police Law passed at the beginning of the year was also targeted for criticism. With the catch-all justification of "combatting threats," it grants the authorities the discretion to restrict all basic rights. Lena, a member of the "Polizeiklasse" (Police Class) artist group, criticised the law's arbitrary character and the vagueness of the "threat" concept, which is above all directed against foreigners and political opponents.

"Polizeiklasse" emerged in response to the Police Assignments Law (PAGE) in Bavaria, before establishing a group in Dresden, which became especially well known for its protest actions at the College of Fine Arts.

In stark contrast to the sentiments of most participants, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Greens and Left Party conducted significant interventions. While these parties have barely participated in previous anti-fascist protests, they

sought to flood the demonstration with their flags and loudspeakers.

The transparent attempt to secure more votes and pose as opponents of the shift of politics ever further to the right was met with deserved contempt by most protesters. Berlin SPD politician Sawsa Chebli was ridiculed by many Twitter users for a picture that appeared just before the #unteilbar demonstration showing her with Deputy Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Deputy Minister President in Saxony Martin Dullig (both SPD). Angry comments denounced them as “right-wing capitalists” and criticised them for their “hypocrisy.”

Many people pointed to the critical role played by the SPD in implementing right-wing policies. Olaf Scholz, as mayor of Hamburg, was himself chiefly responsible for the brutal repression meted out to G20 protesters. As finance minister in the federal government, he has continued to enforce ruthless austerity, and as deputy chancellor he bears responsibility for the establishment of deportation camps, the mass drownings in the Mediterranean, and Germany’s major rearmament programme.

Both the Greens and Left Party, as part of governments at the state level, are responsible for inhumane deportations, implementing social spending cuts, strengthening the state’s repressive apparatus, and whipping up anti-immigrant xenophobia. The Left Party’s parliamentary group leader has repeatedly criticised the #unteilbar movement because it calls for open borders.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) opposed the right-wing policies of all of the other parties and distributed the statement “Stop the right-wing conspiracy!,” which opposes the party’s surveillance by the Verfassungsschutz secret service. The statement details how all of the established parties are encouraging the far-right so as to enforce their policies of social spending cuts and militarism in the face of widespread popular opposition.

By defaming the SGP as “left-wing extremist” and “anti-constitutional,” while it covers for and supports neo-Nazis, the Verfassungsschutz is trying to intimidate anyone who protests against the rise of the far right.

“With its attack on the SGP, this criminal state agency wants to set a precedent for the creation of an explicitly political and ideological justice system that

will pursue anyone who criticises reactionary social and political trends. Striking workers will be targeted just as much as booksellers who sell Marxist literature, or critical artists, journalists, or intellectuals,” the statement declares.

These arguments struck a chord with many participants on the demonstration. Uwe, who attended the demonstration because he didn’t want to be intimidated by the far-right, spoke of his shock about the Verfassungsschutz’s attack on the SGP. “The Verfassungsschutz is using pure Orwellian newspeak, because it is not protecting democracy, but is rather seeking to defend capitalism against any criticism! This of course requires the use of lies and slander.” One only needs to look at the election campaign of former Verfassungsschutz head Hans-Georg Maassen for the CDU/AfD in Saxony to see what this organisation is capable of, added Uwe.

Lena from the “Polizei-klasse” artist group wasn’t surprised to hear of the Verfassungsschutz’s cooperation with right-wing extremist terrorists and its attack on the SGP. “There’s a history of that here,” she said. “There was no de-Nazification after 1945. The old Nazis just got new jobs and built the BND (foreign intelligence agency). This doesn’t come out of the blue,” she said. “Just like the NSU complex and the murder of Walter Lübcke, they always try to dismiss these events and ignore that right-wing extremists are behind these murders.”

Another participant in the demonstration noted that Saxony’s state intelligence agency not only denies the right-wing extremist character of the AfD and Pegida, but slanders several bands and musicians as left-wing extremists. The intelligence agency said the same thing about the “We are more” concert in Chemnitz, which was attended by some 70,000 people in protest against a right-wing rampage in the city.



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