

Protests erupt in Germany against police violence, racism and fascism

Our reporters
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The global protests against the brutal police murder of George Floyd reached a new high point last weekend. In Germany, silent marches and protest rallies took place in almost every city. Hundreds of thousands of overwhelmingly young people took to the streets to show their solidarity with the protests in the United States, and to denounce police violence and the return of the far right in the country.

The mass outpouring of popular outrage in the US over the murder of Floyd was the spark that ignited the demonstrations in Germany against the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), the right-wing policies of the grand coalition, the arming of the police and military, the undermining of democratic rights, and the growth of unemployment and social inequality.

Last year, many demonstrations, including several large protests, took place in opposition to new police laws drafted by all of the establishment parties, including the Left Party and Greens. Major demonstrations were also triggered by the murder of Kassel district president Walter Lübcke, the concealing of far-right networks within the state apparatus, the fascist terrorist attack on a synagogue in Halle, the far-right killings in Hanau, and the election of a minister president in Thuringia supported by the fascistic AfD.

But last weekend's demonstrations went a step further, initiating a new stage of social and political protest and resistance.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, each protest was only registered for a few hundred participants. In Berlin, where 1,500 people were expected, 30,000 ended up taking part. Just as many took part in Munich, where only 200 participants had been registered. More than 20,000 joined protests in Düsseldorf and Hamburg, while more than 10,000 demonstrated in Frankfurt, Hanover, and Cologne. Thousands more

demonstrated in Stuttgart, Freiburg, Nuremberg, Dresden, and many other cities.

Young people dominated the protests everywhere. Many of them are connected with friends online around the world and have no intention of accepting reactionary nationalism, xenophobia, police brutality, and the reemergence of right-wing and fascist parties.

In addition, many of them are precariously employed, have lost their student jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic, cannot complete their professional training, and face a totally uncertain future.

The demonstrations were publicised with the hashtags #SilentDemo, #BlackLivesMatter, and #SayTheirNames, a reference to the victims of the terrorist attack in Hanau. Protesters remained silent for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, the length of time Floyd was choked to death by a police officer.

Placards on the demonstrations also recalled the horrific fate of Oury Jalloh, an asylum seeker who burnt to death while in police custody in a cell in 2005.

A demonstrator carried a placard in Berlin reading, "What is happiness without equality?" This made clear that fundamental social and political questions are coming to the surface. Another homemade placard read, "Enough is enough!", which underscored that the murder of Floyd was a trigger event.

The dramatic intensification of class tensions is the inevitable product of the deepest capitalist crisis in close to a century. The growing war danger, climate change, and the growth of social inequality are the causes of sharpening class tensions and the breakdown of democratic forms of rule.

These issues were widely discussed on Twitter. Robert wrote on Saturday, "Fascism takes many forms ... If you see how the police and national guard are going on the rampage in the United States, it's very

reminiscent of the pattern of fascism.” Tom tweeted that the police in the United States are behaving like an occupying force, while President Trump wants to deploy regular troops. “The rhetoric of ‘battlespace’ is very clearly in that direction.”

In several cities, police tried to disperse the demonstrations on the pretext that they were not observing pandemic restrictions. However, given the large number of participants, these efforts failed. The police mainly retreated and allowed the protests to proceed.

However, they sealed off streets leading to Alexanderplatz in Berlin, where the demonstrators were located. There, and in Hamburg, police violence erupted following the peaceful protests. Eye witnesses told the WSWs that young people were kettled in Hamburg and attacked with batons. The police also deployed water cannons to clear a square in the city centre. Eye witnesses also reported that 36 migrant children and young people were detained overnight in Hamburg.

In Berlin, more than 90 people were arrested following clashes. A video shared widely on Twitter from Berlin provided evidence of the brutal police violence in this country. The person filming the scene commented on it by writing, “Was George Floyd not enough?”

Unlike the mass protests against the second Iraq war in 2003, when the German government coalition of Social Democrats and Greens opposed the war and parliamentary parties supported the protests, the protests this time around are directed precisely against these parties. It is significant that the Social Democrat/Left Party/Green state government in Berlin and the Social Democrat/Green state government in Hamburg were the two governments to launch the most ruthless crackdown on the protests, including by ordering the use of water cannons and mounted police. The SPD Interior Senator in Hamburg also ordered the violent dispersal of a protest on Friday.

But resistance is increasing. Protests continued on Sunday in Leipzig and several other cities. In Cologne, thousands took part in a demonstration in the morning against the AfD, before another protest for Floyd was held in the afternoon.

The media did its best to downplay the scale of the resistance. The same reporters and commentators who

sought to exaggerate the strength of the small protests by the far-right Pegida movement and the recent right-wing protests against the coronavirus lockdown measures, which helped make their positions politically and socially acceptable, now seek to underestimate the numbers of participants as much as possible and restrict their reporting to the least that can be expected.

This is motivated by the ruling elite’s fear of a social explosion.

A concerned comment from the right-wing newspaper *Die Welt*, published by Springer Verlag, makes this very clear. Under the title “A country on its knees,” editor Markus Boeller wrote that the police officer Derek Chauvin used his knee against George Floyd as a weapon by pushing it into his neck.

If demonstrators around the world are now kneeling, wrote *Die Welt*, “then this is no longer a defensive pose in the liturgical symbolism of the peace movement.” Kneeling is a “powerful gesture” of humility towards the victims of police violence, and also a sign that “the patience with the perpetrators has reached its limit.” Boeller concluded, “Kneeling is not a gesture of subordination, but a preparation for the uprising.”

“Respect existence or expect resistance,” declared a homemade placard in Cologne.

It is essential to unite this mass international movement of young people and workers against police violence with the struggles of the working class against insecure working conditions, mass unemployment, growing social inequality, and widespread poverty. This involves a struggle against the global capitalist system, which demands an international socialist perspective.



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