

Germany: Police powers stepped up after “Stuttgart’s Night of Violence”

Jan Ritter
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The ruling class are using the so-called “Stuttgart’s Night of Violence” as legitimization for the establishment of a police state. In the night from June 20 to 21, clashes between youths and the police broke out in front of the Stuttgart State Opera following a 17-year-old boy being searched for drugs. For more than a week now, police officers in full protective equipment can be seen throughout Stuttgart’s city centre. Around Eckensee, in front of the Stuttgart State Opera, police patrol daily and conduct checks on young people.

At the weekend, several hundred policemen were on continuous duty. In addition to the officers in full protective equipment, 30 patrols from two inner-city districts, riot police riders and plainclothes officers were deployed. Extensive personal checks were carried out throughout the night—in addition to identity checks, numerous bags and backpacks were searched and young people frisked all over their bodies. These measures are to become a nationwide standard through new police laws.

At the end of the conference of interior ministers hosted by Thuringia’s Prime Minister Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) and his Interior Minister Georg Maier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) in Erfurt on June 19, the interior ministers of all federal states stood united behind the police. They declared that the police were in the “centre of society,” were “impartial and open-minded” and therefore needed stronger backing from people and institutions.

As the first sign of support for the police, the interior ministers agreed to significantly increase the penalties for using violence against the police, as a deterrent. In practice, even a defensive action—such as reflexively holding one’s hand in front of one’s face—is counted as a use of force against the police.

The violence does not emanate *from* the population, but from the police *against* the population—especially against workers and young people. Every year, about 2,000 complaints of unjustified police violence are reported. According to a study on police violence at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (RUB), under the direction of Prof. Dr. Tobias Singelnstein, the high number of unreported cases

means it must be assumed that there are about 12,000 cases per year.

The interim report of the study shows “among other things, that in 86 percent of the reported incidents no criminal proceedings were conducted, i.e., the cases were not included in the statistics. More than 70 percent of the respondents report physical injuries.” It goes on to say, “It was found that most of the reported incidents (55 percent) took place during demonstrations and political actions.”

Both the interim results of this study, as well as the numerous revelations about right-wing extremist networks in the police force—such as in the book “Extreme Security”—expose the lie about the “impartial and liberal-minded” police force that “stands in the centre of society.” Under capitalism, the police function to protect the property and power relations in the interests of the ruling class and—as Frederick Engels wrote in his work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*—to oppose and suppress the interests of the working class, as a “public authority.”

The German police are notorious for their brutal actions, especially against left-wing demonstrators. The “Panorama 3” report by Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR), broadcast on June 23, provides an example. In the introduction to the report “Police Violence in the North: A structural problem?” NDR said, “A peaceful demonstration against racism and police violence is broken up. The participants are driven apart. Fights break out. Anna and her friends just wanted to go home.”

Anna—whose name was changed because she is afraid of being recognized—describes the police violence she experienced in Hamburg on June 6. Following a worldwide demonstration triggered by the brutal police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, she was detained by the police for several hours along with 37 other people, including many youths and a child.

“Officers poured out of their vehicle, blocking any exit. So, we were really encircled and pressed against the wall. Or in my case, pushed,” Anna reports. They “then tried to look

for someone. My friend saw him crouching on the ground. Four policemen were sitting on him—somehow. I wanted to turn around and see what happened. But then they screamed at me again to turn back against the wall.”

These are the daily experiences that many youths and young people have with the police when they take to the streets against social inequality and repression by the state or demonstrate for their democratic rights.

At present, new, stricter police laws are being drafted in many federal states. All parties in the Bundestag are working closely together on this. In the SPD-Left Party-Green Party governed city-state of Bremen, video surveillance is to be massively expanded and telecommunications monitored “preventively,” without even the excuse of a criminal offence having been committed. Video surveillance is to become the standard at major events such as Christmas markets, in detention cells and police vehicles. The preventive monitoring of telecommunications, telephone conversations and SMS messages means they will be tapped and recorded—and the location data of mobile phones logged.

In the Baden-Württemberg, under a Christian Democrat-Green Party state executive, the police law was already tightened up in 2017. State Premier Winfried Kretschmann (Green) declared back then, “We are going to the limit of what is constitutionally possible.” The law in Germany’s southwest allows, among other things, the use of explosives against persons, “intelligent” video surveillance to detect behaviour patterns and the deployment of so-called state trojans (spying software).

In October 2018, plans were already announced to tighten up the police law again. The reason cited was the need to implement EU directives. According to a draft, among other things, detention pending trial, comprehensive online searches, random checks at major events with a “high risk potential” and filming using body cams in apartments and business premises were to be enshrined in law.

The amendment presented is so far-reaching that the Society for Civil Liberties (GFF) and the Baden-Württemberg Bar Association declared whole sections to be contrary to the constitution. The threshold for serious encroachments on fundamental rights would be lowered disproportionately by the legislation and the legal protections of those affected would be conspicuously neglected. The association also complains that not “only selective changes would be made,” but that a “completely new wording of the law was presented.”

These comprehensive efforts to tighten up police laws and to extend the powers of the police will be further expanded after the events in Stuttgart. In an orchestrated campaign, establishment politicians and the media are trying to paint a picture of the increasing propensity of young people to use

violence—especially against state officials—and are calling for tough action and draconian punishments.

In an interview with Metropolnews on June 26, Baden-Württemberg’s Interior Minister Thomas Strobl (CDU) said, “In the short term, we will strengthen police forces at the weekend, in the medium term, the security partnership I have offered the city of Stuttgart will have an effect, and thirdly, we need tougher penalties for this massively violent mob.” Significantly, he then referred to the decisions of the conference of interior ministers to increase penalties for violent mobs against the police.

Strobl also wants to extend the criminal offence of breaching the peace, “to be able to hold those who stand there yelling and screaming when police officers ... are attacked. They too shall feel the severity of the law.” Taken to its logical conclusion, this means anyone who does not support the actions of the police can be threatened with prosecution. This is intended to prevent any criticism of the behaviour of individual police officers and the police as a whole and to create an atmosphere of intimidation.

The campaign for police-state measures is accompanied by racist propaganda. In a voice message circulating on the Internet from a police officer—sent to his colleagues during the operation in Stuttgart and whose authenticity was confirmed by the police—he calls the young “rioters” “Kanaks,” a derogatory term for black people. Mainstream politicians and the media take their cue from the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD) and rail against “violent refugees and migrants.”

Contrary to the official claims, the massive stepping up of police powers does not serve the fight against violence or the prevention of crimes, but the interests of the political, military and economic elites. These are using the coronavirus crisis to further enrich themselves, to intensify the exploitation of workers in insecure conditions and to advance the politics of militarism. To suppress the growing resistance against this, they are systematically stepping up the powers and capacity of the state at home. This is the purpose of the large-scale propaganda offensive and police-state exercise in Stuttgart.



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