

May Day in Germany: Police and unions take action against opponents of war

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Around 330,000 people took part in over 450 May Day demonstrations and rallies across Germany on Wednesday.

At the demonstrations, members of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) condemned the massacre in Gaza and NATO's proxy war in Ukraine. They advocated uniting the working class worldwide against imperialist war. They promoted the online May Day rally of the International Committee of the Fourth International and called for the freedom of Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotyuk, who was arrested and imprisoned for his defence of the unity of the Russian and Ukrainian working class.

In Stuttgart, SGP European election candidate S. Ratnamaheson declared: "The official slogan of the DGB (German Trade Union Confederation)—more pay, free time, justice—is a lie. The trade unions are systematically organising cuts in real wages and are responsible for social inequality. They are deeply involved in the German government's preparations for war."

While many demonstrators wanted to fight against capitalism and war, the trade union bureaucracy reaffirmed its support for the government's pro-war policy and joined forces with the police to crack down on opponents of war. In Berlin, for example, opponents of the genocide in Gaza were excluded from DGB rallies and persecuted by the police, while in Stuttgart the police violently attacked demonstrators and arrested 167 people.

In Berlin, according to *Tagesspiegel*, around 30,000 people took part in over 20 peaceful demonstrations. A demonstration in the Kreuzberg and Neukölln districts with more than 10,000 participants was marked by vocal opposition to the genocide in Gaza. Four thousand people took part in a protest march

through the residential neighbourhood of Grunewald in the west of Berlin.

On the initiative of DGB officials, around 100 opponents of the genocide in Gaza were excluded from the union demonstration, which had about around 14,000 participants, and were separated from the protest by the police. Although the majority of those excluded were trade union members, their shouts of "Free Palestine" and the description of the Israeli actions in Gaza as genocide were deemed "not welcome," according to a DGB spokesperson, and would be "excluded from the demonstration."

When one person resisted, police took their personal details. DGB officials then filed criminal charges for "incitement of the people," whereupon the police began an investigation into two people. Members of the DGB youth organisation had previously tried to remove Palestinian flags from participants.

The DGB and its member unions are notorious for their open support of Germany's pro-war policy. In February, for example, Europe's largest industrial union, IG Metall, published a joint paper with the Social Democrats' (SPD) Economic Forum and the arms lobby calling for a further strengthening of the arms industry.

Although the police—who deployed 6,200 officers in Berlin—admitted that all the protests were "peaceful," 30 people were arrested. Reports circulated by the police about "caches of stones" allegedly found on rooftops turned out to be construction sites.

In Frankfurt am Main, the DGB celebrated May Day in front of the "Römer," Frankfurt City Hall, which was decorated with Ukrainian and Israeli flags. The previous evening, regional DGB leader Philipp Jacks together with Frankfurt's Mayor Mike Josef (SPD) had hoisted the DGB flag there. Mike Josef was also invited

to speak at the May Day rally.

The officials tried to surround themselves with striking Lieferando drivers, who are confronted with inhumane working conditions at the billion-dollar delivery service. The DGB trade union NGG (Food, Beverages and Catering Union) is seeking a collective agreement and €1 more in hourly wages.

However, by holding the rally under Israeli and Ukrainian flags, the DGB also made it clear how firmly it stands on the side of the state and the capitalists, and that it particularly supports the German government providing arms and financial aid for Ukraine in the war against Russia and for the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

In Stuttgart, there was a violent confrontation with police, during which 167 demonstrators were arrested and their march broken up. Several hundred participants carried banners against the Gaza war and Palestinian flags, as well as placards with slogans against social inequality and war. A very large police contingent, including mounted officers and police dogs, accompanied the march.

After a short time, the police command apparently used the pretext of several “unauthorised” banners as the reason to intervene violently. Around 150 participants at the front were separated from the rest of the demonstration and kettled. Because the remaining 400 or so participants did not allow themselves to be pushed away, but remained where they were and expressed their solidarity with those being kettled, the police declared the previously authorised demonstration over and broke it up.

The police claimed they had been “suddenly” attacked with pepper spray, as well as “roofing batons with screws” and other forms of “striking tools.” A police report, which was immediately disseminated uncritically in the media, spoke of 25 injured police officers and three injured police horses.

However, according to *Der Spiegel*, a spokeswoman for the protest organisers rejected this and explained late on Wednesday evening that if police officers had been injured by pepper spray, then this was “due to the massive use of irritant gas from their own ranks.” In addition, the police had “categorised confiscated materials—such as the supports for large banners and signs on wooden slats—used as tools for attacks.”

The videos circulating of the confrontation show pepper spray being used exclusively by police officers,

along with several mounted police officers driving their horses into the front of the demonstration. The demonstrators have so far reported “95 injuries as a result of police attacks,” and of injuries caused by the use of police batons as well as eye and skin irritation from pepper spray.

Although these clarifications paint a completely different picture of the events, Stuttgart Mayor Frank Nopper (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) spoke of “rioters and violent criminals” who had “abused the right to demonstrate” and attacked “all of us.”

A DGB event with bratwurst and music that had previously taken place on the market square only drew 2,000 participants, including many trade union officials as well as activists from the SPD, Left Party and the Maoist MLPD.

In Leipzig, the DGB leadership itself took over the policing function, with DGB regional leader Manuela Grimm personally lending a hand to tear down Palestinian flags. When this failed, other trade union officials intervened and simply banned the carrying of Palestinian flags, announcing: “You have one minute to leave the demonstration. There will be no discussion: The minute is running.”



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