

Heiligendamm's "Green Zone"

Massive security preparations for upcoming G8 summit in Germany

By Peter Schwarz
25 May 2007

In preparation for the G8 summit of world leaders to be held June 6-8 in Germany, the idyllic bathing resort of Heiligendamm is being transformed into a high-security tract resembling the notorious "Green Zone" in Baghdad. The leaders of the seven major industrial nations and Russia will be entrenched behind a wall 12 kilometres long, 2.5 metres high (7.5 miles by 8.2 feet), comprising 4,600 steel panels, mounted with barbed wire, cameras and sensory detectors. An exclusion zone of 11 nautical miles will be established out to sea, complemented by an air exclusion zone extended 50 kilometres into the skies.

The cost of these measures is estimated at €92 million. Additional expenses include the wages and overtime of 16,000 police assembled from across Germany, who will provide around-the-clock protection for the eight world leaders attending the summit.

Even this is not enough, however. To prevent protests against the summit and to intimidate demonstrators, the federal interior minister and police authority are working with their counterparts in the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (MWP)—where Heiligendamm is situated—to draw up a range of repressive measures which would warm the hearts of most authoritarian rulers.

These measures began on May 9 with a series of coordinated police raids carried out across the country involving 900 police officers in six northern German states. Police searched 40 offices and dwellings occupied by opponents of the summit and seized computers, hard discs and written documents. The raids were organised by the general federal attorney, Monika Harms, and justified on the basis of Germany's

anti-terror laws. The raids represented the first-ever use of the controversial paragraph 129a—allegedly directed against the danger of terrorism—for the criminalisation of political opponents.

The raids were subsequently condemned by a number of jurists and politicians who declared them to be completely out of proportion to any real danger to the state. They were clearly aimed at intimidating the opponents of the summit and collecting confidential information about planned protests. After the raid, the Federal Prosecutor's Office declared it was investigating 21 suspects in connection with "terrorist" arson attacks, but no arrest warrants had been issued because, according to a spokeswoman, there was a lack of any real evidence. It is clear, therefore, that the "suspicions" of terrorism were merely a pretext.

Since then, there has been a veritable flood of new measures against the planned protests proposed by the federal interior minister, Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) and local police authorities.

According to one of Germany's main television channels, the state of MWP is "preparing mass prisons for opponents of globalisation." Potential prisoners include not only demonstrators, guilty of an offence or refusing to obey the dictates of the police, but also potential delinquents, who can be "pre-emptively" imprisoned—a practice disturbingly similar to the notorious protective custody of the Nazis.

Following the threat of preventive detention for potentially violent demonstrators by Interior Minister Schäuble, the spokeswoman for the MWP interior ministry, Marion Schlender, declared that the state would "fully exhaust" its legal capacities for preventive detention of presumed culprits.

MWP's Security and Order Law (SOG) allows so-called preventive safekeeping of up to 10 days. The law was passed in the last legislative period with the votes of the Left-Party-PDS, which governed in a coalition with the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Following a recent state election, the state is now governed by a grand coalition of the SPD and CDU. While the Left Party is one of the co-organisers of the current protests against the G8 summit, it prefers to keep quiet about the role played by members of its own party in introducing repressive legislation in MWP.

MWP Interior Minister Lorenz Caffier (CDU) has also taken precautions to speed up the prosecution of offending demonstrators, so they can be sentenced immediately after their alleged offence.

Protesters could end up behind bars for simply getting too close to the security fence. For the period May 30 to June 8, the regional police has banned all public meetings within a distance of 200 metres from the security fence and around the local airport where summit leaders will land for their conference.

This means that the ban on demonstrations extends to a distance of 5-10 kilometres from the conference centre. There is no legal basis for this restriction. The organisers of the planned protests have asserted that they will apply for an injunction against the ruling and if necessary take the issue to the German Constitutional Court.

The interior undersecretary of state and former president of the Federal Information Service (BND), August Hanning, cynically justified this flagrant violation of the freedom of assembly with the assertion that Germany wanted to be "a good host." This evidently means that demonstrations against the summit are permissible only if the summit participants and accompanying journalists are completely unaware of them.

The Federal Prosecutor's Office has also resorted to obtaining samples of the odours of globalisation opponents, in order to be able to identify them later with the help of sniffer dogs. Up until now, such operational methods were the exclusive domain of the Stasi Stalinist secret police in the former East Germany. At a museum dedicated to the activities of the Stasi, it is still possible to view the odour samples (in glass bottles) obtained by agents of opponents of the GDR regime.

While a number of politicians have raised reservations of this practice—parliamentary Vice-President Wolfgang Thierse (SPD) complained of "police state methods à la GDR"—Interior Minister Schäuble has unreservedly defended the measures. He told Bavarian radio, "In certain cases it is a means to identify possible suspects." The issue was to ensure the security of the G8 summit, he said, and this would be done by the police using all "appropriate means."

The external circumstances of the G8 summit mirror the relationship between the heads of states and governments who often describe themselves as the leaders of the "free world" and the mass of the population, which is held at bay by barbed wire fences, troops of police and bans on demonstration: a deep social and political gulf yawns between the two sides.

To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>