

After Hamburg protests: German Left Party backs law-and-order campaign

By Ulrich Rippert
13 July 2017

Incidents of vandalism attributed to protesters on the sidelines of last weekend's G-20 summit in Hamburg are being exploited to whip up a right-wing law-and-order campaign throughout Germany.

Any criticism of capitalism, austerity, military build-up and preparations for war is being criminalized. The goal is the construction of a police state directed not against a few vandals but the entire working class and all forms of social opposition.

Every party now has inscribed as its election campaign theme the strengthening of the state apparatus against left-wing protest and social resistance. Free Democratic Party (FDP) chairman Christian Lindner spoke for them all when he demanded in the *Bild* newspaper "more respect for the police" and described criticism of capitalism as intellectual arson.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) has placed itself at the head of this aggressive and demagogic campaign for a domestic security build-up. It is drawing on a long tradition. Nearly a century ago, Social Democratic Minister Gustav Noske declared that someone had to serve as the "bloodhound," and played a key role in the brutal suppression of the November 1918 revolution, and the murdering of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

Today, the SPD claims it is better able to enforce Germany's new great-power policy than the right-wing Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU). The SPD has exploited the Hamburg events to attack Merkel and the CDU/CSU from the right. Its leading personnel are seeking to outdo each other with demands for hiring more police and the arming of officers.

Justice Minister Heiko Mas (SPD) demanded a relentless clampdown on left-wing criminals, including the establishment of a European extremist database for left-wing radicals, and appealed for a "rock against the left" concert. The SPD executive has coined the term "protest terrorism" to criminalise mounting popular opposition to policies of ever more ruthless social attacks and the drive to war.

Despite a major media campaign surrounding its new

leader, Martin Schulz, the SPD suffered significant electoral defeats in recent state elections. The party is viewed contemptuously by large sections of workers and the general population, who see it for what it is: the party of Hartz IV austerity and militarism. The SPD is responding to this opposition by shifting sharply to the right. With its hysterical campaign against the left, the SPD is now openly appealing to right-wing, fascist elements who previously supported the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The Left Party has responded positively to the rightward shift of the SPD and is calling for the strengthening of the state apparatus. While it participated in the main demonstration against the G-20 in Hamburg on Saturday, the Left Party explicitly defended police brutality against criticism and deepened its cooperation with the SPD and the security forces.

Sahra Wagenknecht, the Left Party's parliamentary group leader and the lead candidate for the party in the federal election, stated in an interview with *Die Welt*, "In Hamburg, we mainly saw marauding violent criminals who wantonly wrecked streets, set fire to cars, injured police officers, and threatened residents." Although there were wrong decisions by the police in the lead-up, "obviously nobody can claim that in the subsequent clashes the violence was initiated by the police. On the contrary, 500 injured police officers speaks volumes," said Wagenknecht.

The Left Party in Hamburg was even more open in its support for the police. "The police had a tough and dangerous operation. We wish all of those injured a speedy and full recovery," wrote Sabine Boeddinghaus and Cansu Özdemir, the co-chairs of the Hamburg Left Party state parliamentary group, and domestic policy spokeswoman Christiane Schneider.

The Hamburg Left Party youth even described the police on its Facebook page as "colleagues," threatened protesters, and offered their services to the security forces. "We wish the injured colleagues a speedy and full recovery, and explicitly direct a warning to all violent criminals: anyone who we observe carrying out violence against our GDP

colleagues [GDP is the abbreviation for the police trade union] will be identified and reported by Hamburg Left Party youth. We know where you live and would have no qualms about leading our colleagues in the GDP Hamburg in the early hours to your tents or sleeping quarters!”

The defence of the police, which is now being made a central issue by the SPD and Left Party, amounts to the defence of state terror against the population, and massive attacks on the basic rights of freedom of assembly and freedom of opinion. The extraordinary developments in Hamburg were not the instances of vandalism in the Schanzen district, but rather the provocative, brutal and unlawful operations of the security forces.

The “Committee for Basic Rights and Democracy” sent 43 demonstration observers to Hamburg. They released an initial report at the beginning of the week, which stated, “We observed the extent to which the police assumed control over events in the city during these days. They escalated the situation, ignored citizens’ and human rights, provided false information to the public, and used extreme violence against the people.” The police had, backed up by the Hamburg government, “tried out a state of emergency.”

Claims from the police and security forces that they were surprised by the scale of the violence are part of the lying propaganda campaign. In reality, the pictures of street battles, looting, and burning cars were sought by the state forces to carry out precisely the political campaign in favour of a stronger state and the agitation against left-wing critics of capitalism that is now taking place.

The evidence for this is wide-ranging. Videos prove that undercover armed police were active in Hamburg among the anarchist demonstrators. The anarchist scene in Germany and Europe is full of police agent-provocateurs, and the authorities were well aware that groups ready to commit violence were travelling from several countries. Despite this, the police initially held back when violence broke out in the Schanzen district. They left the streets clear for violent hooligans and focused instead on taking videos and photos.

The authorities also knew that right-wingers and hooligans participated in the violence. The neo-Nazi NPD called for this in advance, and said it would be present at the demonstrations. They intended “to teach the protesters the necessary nationalist basic outlook,” the neo-fascist party stated online. The right-wing group “Hooligans against Salifists” also called for members to meet at the central train station in Hannover on Saturday to travel to Hamburg.

This appeal was known to the authorities, because there was a strengthened presence of federal police and railway security workers on the departure platforms, the *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung* reported on Sunday. On Monday, the *Hamburger Morgenpost* wrote that on the

previous Saturday, “more than a dozen” neo-Nazis gathered at Hamburg’s central train station. In the evening, the group moved on to the Schanzen district and joined in the vandalism.

The SPD and Left Party know all of this. Their call for more police and the strengthening of the state apparatus is a response to the rapid intensification of the global crisis of capitalism. The election of Donald Trump as American president has brought the rot of the capitalist system to the surface and intensified it. The sustained, bitter conflict within the American ruling class is destabilising the leading Western power and intensifying the class struggle in the United States and internationally. While the conflicts between the great powers are sharpening, the oligarchic regimes are determined to enforce their interests against the population. This was made very clear during the G-20 summit in Hamburg.

The German ruling class has responded to the “America first” policy of the Trump administration by promoting trade war and militarism. Seventy years after the defeat of Hitler’s Nazis, Germany’s ruling class is once again raising the demand “to lead Europe so as to lead the world,” as it was formulated in 2014 by the Foreign Ministry. To this end, the military budget is to be increased from €37 billion in 2017 to more than €60 billion in 2024. In security circles, discussions are ongoing about Germany acquiring nuclear weapons.

As in the 1930s, these policies can only be implemented with the methods of dictatorship. The federal election campaign is heating up dramatically with the hysterical law-and-order campaign being pushed by all capitalist parties. Left-wing politics and protest are being criminalized in order to bring a government to power based on extreme right-wing and fascist forces, and capable of enforcing the policies of the ruling elite by force.

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) is the only political party standing in the federal election for a socialist and internationalist program against war and social inequality, and in defence of democratic rights. The SGP is warning workers of the enormous dangers they confront and preparing them for the class battles to come.

To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>