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Berlin Senate pushes police-state measures after New Year's "riot night"

For over two weeks, the events of the so-called "Berlin New Year's Eve" have served German politicians and media as a pretext for a right-wing police-state campaign and noxious racist agitation.

As Berlin's governing mayor, Franziska Giffey, extends invitations to a "summit against youth violence," ostensibly in reaction to events of New Year's night, it becomes abundantly clear: In the midst of the ongoing election campaign for the Berlin House of Representatives, the Social Democrat (SPD) and her Green and Left Party coalition partners are hysterically invoking the "strong state" and calling for increased arming of the police.



Berlin Mayor Franziska Giffey (SPD) and the Senator for Integration, Labour and Social Affairs Katja Kipping (Left Party) [AP Photo/Michael Sohn]

Day after day in Germany there continues a flood of reports of supposedly new findings about the events of that night, as well as other right-wing agitations, which the media pass on, often unvetted, but for that all the more eagerly. The parallels to the New Year's Eve events in Cologne and Hamburg in 2016 and in Leipzig in 2020 are unmistakable, and the purpose behind them is obvious: the extent of whatever violence occurred is completely exaggerated and a racist narrative is developed alluding to perpetrators of migrant origin.

The mayor of Berlin's Neukölln district, Martin Hikel (SPD), ranted in an interview with *Die Welt* about "civil war-like conditions" and demanded that delinquent youths should "have to spend longer in jail."

In a questionnaire to the Interior Committee of the SPD-Left-Green coalition Senate, the conservative Christian Democrats (CDU) demanded that the first names of suspects with German citizenship be disclosed, modeling themselves after the far-right Alternative for Germany party (AfD), which had requested the first names of knife attackers in Saarland in 2019.

Asked about the Berlin New Year's night, CDU leader Friedrich Merz ranted on *Markus Lanz*: "We're talking about people who really have no business being here in Germany."

The reality is that the real facts about New Year's Eve remain unclear. What is clear, however, is that the events have been massively exaggerated.

At the end of last week, the *Tagesspiegel* reported that there had been only 38 arrests in connection with firecrackers thrown at police officers and firefighters, and not 145 as originally reported. Of these, two-thirds of the suspects were of German nationality. Without further specifics, the *Tagesspiegel* referred to information "from the Berlin police."

The original figure of 145 arrests referred to all the people arrested by the police units deployed for New Year's Eve on the basis of various offenses, the *Tagesspiegel* continues. These included, in addition to attacks on emergency responders: arson, violations of the Explosives Law and breach of the peace.

On Friday evening, Berlin police spokesman Martin Halweg claimed, when asked by *Focus online*, that the Berlin police had not communicated nor published the *Tagesspiegel* figures. He added, "We do not know where the *Tagesspiegel* got that information." The police spokesman said that there was currently no information about the citizenship of arrested individuals.

Initially, there had even been reports of 159 arrests, which police then reduced to 145 due to double counting—but now suddenly no one knows anything concrete. Initially racist

agitation had been fueled by reports of 18 different nationalities of primarily male suspects, among them 45 people with German, 27 with Afghan and 21 with Syrian citizenship.

It is currently unclear how many of the youth suspects, who were released shortly after their arrest, engaged in violence at all. Since all of the suspects have legitimate residence status, the suspicion arises that they were detained primarily because of their origin.

According to the Berlin police, reliable information will supposedly be available this week.

Using the obviously exaggerated arrest count from the Berlin “riot night” and the racist agitation of politics and media, the ruling class is pushing a deafening “law and order” campaign.

Giffey's “Summit against Youth Violence”

The “Summit against Youth Violence,” which Mayor Franziska Giffey convened on January 11, was very much in the spirit of “Law and Order.” According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, she described the events of New Year’s Eve as a “caesura” for the work to be done in Berlin. In other words, Giffey is using the inflated arrest count from New Year’s to massively arm the police and ensure increased police control throughout the city. A further meeting as part of the Youth Summit is scheduled for February 22.

Invited to the summit were representatives of the Senate, the individual districts of Berlin, the police as well as the Attorney General’s Office, the Commissioner for Integration and Migration of the State of Berlin and the Integration Commissioner of the Neukölln district as well as youth social workers’ and youth representatives. How little interest there was in the actual target group was demonstrated by the fact that only very few young people were invited.

The official goal of the summit was to develop a “targeted and comprehensive approach to preventing youth violence in Berlin.” Instead, hollow phrases such as “parental work and school social work,” “extracurricular youth social work,” and “strong neighborhoods and places for young people” were recorded in a resolution paper and padded empty statements. Every supposedly progressive measure, the resolution concluded, would first have to be “examined,” that is, postponed indefinitely.

In the fourth and final point of the resolution, however, it becomes clear what Giffey is actually after. She is calling for “clear consequences in the case of criminal offenses and border violations” and threatens drastic punishment for young people who commit crimes.

Within just three paragraphs, the resolution makes five references to the controversial “Neukölln Model,” which foresees summary judicial proceedings against mild to moderate cases of juvenile delinquency, for example shoplifting or assault. The public prosecutor’s office, police and courts are to cooperate particularly closely so that “punishment follows on the heels” of alleged crimes.

The “Neukölln Model” stems from the juvenile judges Stephan Kuperion and Kirsten Heisig, who died in 2010. The latter was known as “Judge Merciless.” In her posthumously published book “The End of Patience,” Heisig called for isolated schooling in homes for criminal children and harsher sentences for young violent offenders. It was not only in a 2009 *Spiegel* interview that she engaged in racist stereotyping and attributed violence to immigrant backgrounds.

Without even coming close to clarifying the facts of Berlin’s New Year’s Eve, Berlin’s Justice Senator Lena Kreck (Left Party) also called for summary proceedings and invoked the “full force of the rule of law.”

The fourth point of the Youth Summit resolution further calls for “offender-oriented” prevention “in places particularly affected by violence.” It goes on to say, “The perpetrator structure and the places where attacks were clustered will be evaluated.”

This is an unmistakable call to expand racial profiling and to increase police control. Apparently, arbitrary (“low-threshold”) police stops are foreseen when young people are approached by the Berlin police in case of “conspicuousness.”

There is no question that the “additional funds” mentioned in the resolution, which the Senate wants to make available, will go directly toward arming the police.

What was deliberately left out of the “Summit against Youth Violence” is that the SPD-Left-Green coalition State Senate has made Berlin the capital of poverty, unaffordable rents, dilapidated schools and decaying hospitals. The resolution’s hypocritical blather about preventive measures is representative of the ruling class's authoritarian reaction to the consequences of social devastation.

A commentary on the Berlin New Year's Eve on the WSWS stated: “If some young people threw firecrackers at police cars on New Year’s Eve and hindered the fire brigade in extinguishing work, this is a desperate expression of anger at the disastrous social situation they face and lack of prospects into which the ruling parties have plunged them.”

The war in Ukraine, which the federal government is unscrupulously exacerbating, along with high inflation, mass mortality since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, and

massive social inequality are robbing young people of the prospect of a future worth living.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP), the German section of the Fourth International, condemns the right-wing offensive for “law and order” and the attendant vile racist agitation. The SGP is running in the Berlin senate elections to give voice and a socialist perspective to the enormous opposition to the federal and state policies of social devastation and the war policies of the federal government.

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