



Germany: Nazis march in Berlin - a serious warning

Georg Ismael, Gruppe ArbeiterInnenmacht, Berlin Sat, 25/08/2018 - 13:15

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On Saturday, August 17, German fascists were able to hold a march in Berlin in memory of Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess. For several years, neo-Nazi groups have tried to mark the date in 1987 when Hess, held as a war criminal in Spandau prison, took his own life, at the age of 93.

Last year, they succeeded in assembling where the prison once stood but were prevented from marching more than a few hundred metres by a mass anti-fascist mobilisation. This year, the commemoration, which was formally sponsored by individuals well-known to be associated with organisations such as the National Party of Germany, NPD, essentially the successor organisation to the Nazi Party, the Third Way, the "Independent National Socialists" and Die Rechte, was not allowed to gather at Spandau but was redirected closer to Central Berlin by the police. There, the 700 Nazi supporters were not only allowed to march but to hold a closing rally.

Balance sheet

In the weeks before, there had certainly been an effective mobilisation against the Hess March in Spandau. The North East Antifa played a particularly positive role in this but the Left Party and the SPD also called for a counter protest. As a result, about 4,000 anti-fascists, among them many trade unionists and, in particular, young people, gathered in Spandau on the morning of August 17. REVOLUTION and the Group ArbeiterInnenmacht, GAM, also took part with a contingent at the head of the demonstration. What was striking, however, was the absence of large sections of the "radical left", including the German Communist Party, DKP, which were barely visible at all.

When it became known that the Nazis would not march in Spandau, REVOLUTION succeeded in gathering around 1,000 demonstrators, mainly youth, with the aim of taking an organised contingent to the city centre. However, at the sight of the first police cordon, many lost their nerve and scattered in small groups. Although many were able to reach the city centre, the lack of any organisation to reassemble them into an effective force that could prevent the Nazis from marching set the scene for the rest of the day.

Again and again, smaller groups did succeed in temporarily blocking the route in Friedrichshain and Lichtenberg. However, the police broke up these blockades, at times extremely brutally. The lack of numbers could not be overcome even by particularly courageous residents who tried to block roads on the Nazis' route. The last blockade, on Frankfurter Allee/Ecke Ruschestraße, was crushed by the police with the use of truncheons and the numerical superiority of their forces.

On the day, REVOLUTION and the GAM, succeeded in bringing together determined anti-fascists who stayed with our block throughout the day simply because, as several said, we were "very well organised". What became evident in the course of the day, however, was not just the importance of "organisation" but recognition of the political necessity not just to protest at the Nazi march but stop it, to clear them off the streets.

Many on the "radical left" are no longer prepared to actually prevent the Nazis from marching by any means necessary. The Interventionist Left, IL, for example, was content to hold a "bicycle parade", whatever good that was supposed to do. Others didn't even appear. The antifascist left and especially the autonomous milieu must ask themselves what has become of their organisations in recent years. Or did they complacently think that the Nazis would not be able to march in the City Centre anyway?

What is to be done?

The Nazi march could take place primarily because not enough people took to the streets to stop them. But this is not just a question of numbers. Many young people were quite prepared to take a stand against them. More important was the lack of any organisation that could direct militant resistance and respond to developments in the course of the day. What was needed was not only numbers but also leadership and a common understanding that the task was not just to play cat-and-mouse with the police, not just to show how many people oppose the fascists, but to physically stop them marching.

Parties such as DIE LINKE, or the Social Democratic Party, SPD, are not prepared to take this approach. They concentrated far too much on calling for the Hess commemoration to be banned. As if the Nazis, who hoard weapons in their cellars, set refugee homes on fire and attack leftists out on the streets, are ultimately worried whether their marches are legal or not. This is all the more important because of widespread sympathy for them among the police, who even escorted Nazis from Spandau to Friedrichshain in their vans, while doing everything they could to stop anti-fascists crossing the city.

All the same, it was clear on the day that there are many members of the SPD and Left Party, as well as the trade unions, who were certainly willing to take direct action. This proves that demands on these parties to mobilise effectively can fall on fertile ground among members, young people and workers alike. This is all the more important when many from the oh so "radical" left are more noticeable by their absence!

The restriction to purely legalistic methods, or illusions in the bourgeois state, will not stop the Nazis. The same applies to a purely formal commitment to blockades. Of course blockades against Nazi marches are necessary, but to be effective against both Nazis and police, they need to be able to defend themselves, numbers alone are not enough.

The real goal of all antifascist mobilisation must be not only to prevent the fascists from marching, but to drive them completely off the streets. The defining feature of fascism is the building of a mass movement on the streets to physically break up the organisations of the workers' movement and the oppressed. Every successful meeting they hold, every street sale they can complete, as well as every march, is, for them, a step towards that goal. That is why we apply different tactics towards fascist groups as compared to other conservative or nationalist parties.

The Left, as a whole, needs to re-learn the lessons of the past; a strong anti-fascist movement can only be built if revolutionary work is carried out at schools, universities and in the workplace, as REVOLUTION has done for years in Berlin schools, for example. Only in this way can lasting networks be created, and mobilising organisations that go beyond individual actions. This work must be combined with a clear tactic, which is clearly written on our banners in the fight against the fascists: "mass-based, militant, organised".

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