

Germany: May Day, a first balance sheet

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First of all, the positive part of the political balance: Despite a nationwide ban on demonstrations, despite the restrictions on demonstrations to 20-50 people depending on the federal state, thousands of people took part in the left-wing, trade union-oppositional, class-struggle, anti-racist, anti-militarist and anti-capitalist actions on the first of May.

In cities such as Stuttgart and Munich, left-wing alliances were able to effectively enforce demonstrations with 500-600 participants; in Berlin, a good 3,000 people took part in the Revolutionary First May Demonstration in the evening. In Leipzig several hundred also gathered.

In addition to these larger actions, numerous smaller rallies took place, focusing on social issues (work, housing), solidarity with the refugees, the impact of the double crisis of corona danger and recession on women, young people, marginalized people, the struggle of the working class in various sectors. Criticism of capitalism, the federal government and national isolation was a central theme of many of these smaller manifestations.

The Workers' Power and REVOLUTION group took part in a number of these actions, in some cities also as co-organizers. Speeches of our movement are streamed on the Facebook pages of Workers' Power and REVOLUTION and can be accessed there.

Trade unions?

The leaders of the DGB were missing on the First of May. Apart from embarrassing pseudo actions such as a rally of 10 top officials at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, their activity was limited to a virtual event of several hours. The demonstrations of the DGB unions, all company and union mobilizations had already been cancelled weeks ago.

On the Web, the reformist union leaders celebrated themselves and sang the Song of Songs of the Social Partners. "We are fighting to ensure that inequality in the country does not continue to grow," announced DGB leader Reiner Hoffmann, who immediately made it clear how he imagines this to happen: "The swift and decisive action of the federal government was the right one, we also support the rescue packages for the economy. But now it is important to secure employment in the long term and prevent social drifting apart".

In the good tradition of class collaboration, the bureaucracy acts as a supplicant. After the capital ("the economy") has been served with billions in gifts, the workers are also to be helped. After all, Hoffmann muses that something should be dropped in the "partnership" for all classes. Then the "cohesion" in society and especially in the company will work, then everyone can work together for higher shares on the world market, then the social partnership will work like clockwork.

It is only stupid that the capitalist class can only increase its profits at the expense of the "partners", that it

can only survive in competition if profitability and exploitation rate are right. The bourgeoisie, its media and political mouthpieces warn logically that one cannot promise too much to the people. After all, not everyone can be saved, neither at their bedside nor for their livelihood. Only when capital is doing well, i.e. when profits are rising, can everyone prosper at some point.

The employers' associations systematically play down the continuing dangers of the pandemic, its international spread as well as the probability of a second wave. The hygiene regulations that are to be observed when reopening shops, businesses, schools and administrations usually exist only on paper. After all, profit comes first.

If we leave aside the fact that the health and well-being of the masses was never high on the agenda under capitalism, it should be dawning on some trade union leaders that the current crisis is undermining the room for manoeuvre of the social partners, which has always been calculated for a minority of the class anyway. The Grand Coalition, the ideology of national unity, of moving closer together opposing class forces is only the lubricant with which wage earners are to be soaped up, while historical attacks on the working class are being prepared.

The shabby wage (non-)agreements negotiated by the bureaucracy without any internal union discussion do not only mean betrayal of the interests of the wage earners. The anticipatory, non-combatant renunciation of wage increases, the "suspension" of collective bargaining rounds, as in local public transport, not only helps capital economically - it also enables it to make a profit.

Passivity encourages the right

The political passivity and fatalistic hopes for social partners and government unfortunately also encourage reactionary petty-bourgeois, right-wing populist or even fascist forces to act as pseudo-radical opposition.

If hundreds of thousands of trade unionists had taken to the streets on the first of May - and that would have been possible even if the necessary safety distance had been maintained - wage earners would have shaped the public image in numerous cities. The right-wing, so-called "hygiene demonstrations" on Berlin's Luxemburgplatz or the reactionary petty-bourgeois march "Querdenken 711" in Stuttgart would have remained unpleasant marginal phenomena.

The influx of these demonstrations also represents a crushing judgement for the leaderships of the unions, the SPD and the Left Party. The Social Democrats, including their ostensibly leftist leadership duo, present themselves as Merkel's most loyal followers. The SPD ministers are allowed to present a few small concessions, such as the increase in short-time work pay - and otherwise nod off the CDU course. The union leaderships and a large part of the leadership of the Left Party accompany this mostly uncritically.

At the same time, however, the crisis is also driving a large part of middle and small capital, which fears for its existence, of petty bourgeoisie of all kinds, of wage-dependent middle classes and even parts of the workers' aristocracy or demoralized workers to right-wing populist sham protests.

Reactionary Critique

There the cross-class fear of the "little people" is mixed up with conspiracy theories, half-truths (i.e. also "half" lies), irrationalism. All this is garnished with demands for "democracy", "freedom", "self-determination" - all of them seemingly innocent values of bourgeois society.

Their lamentation takes up real problems and grievances - social polarization, impoverishment, support of the rich, ... -. However, the causes of these problems and grievances are not grasped, but are connected with a petty-bourgeois reactionary world view. The real danger of the pandemic is systematically, pseudo-

scientifically and conspiracy-theoretically relativized, even denied - quite similar to the lunatic madness of the so-called "climate skeptics" and their hostility towards science.

Behind this mixture, of course, the petty bourgeois solid business interests are also pressing forward. At the Stuttgart Wasen, fundamental rights are invoked and the restriction of the right to demonstrate is denounced. At the same time, however, the freedom of trade, the buying and selling of goods appears to be the highest freedom of all. Whoever violates it, ruins the "hard working" trade. The right to serve beer becomes a matter of "freedom".

Unconsciously, but all the more unerringly, the producer of goods recognises that the purchase and sale of goods represent the real content of his freedom, his highest human right - and thus unconsciously hits the core of a real relationship, insofar as the purchase and sale of goods actually represent a basic condition of capitalist production and the bourgeois society rising above it.

And because the petty bourgeoisie, like all middle classes and strata, is in danger of being pushed even more against the wall and "declassified" by competition and the restructuring of the production process, it is going to be taken to the barricades. In a demagogic and skilful manner, it is apparently also turning against big business and against individual hate figures of the establishment such as Bill Gates or "do-gooders" like Angela Merkel. The necessary consequences and grievances of capitalism are so finely separated from a supposedly intact world of "pure" and "honest" market economy, where there are no crises and shutdowns.

Petty bourgeoisie

The wage earners who fall for such mobilizations are not only lured by a crude mixture of social questions, half-truths and reactionary explanations. The small businessmen also practice solidarity with the workers by appealing to them as owners of goods and declaring a common interest. They argue like this: "If we can't continue to run our factories because of the irresponsible Corona restrictions, you will lose your job. But since we both want to 'work' - me as an entrepreneur, you as my employee - and since you can't find a job without me, and since I would of course like to keep you employed, we should demonstrate together, form a popular front against the government and the elite.

That this reactionary ideology, which can only be obtained at the price of the political subordination of the workers to the petty bourgeoisie, can be caught, even caught, is encouraged by the passivity of the unions. But not only that. The policy of the social partners, of class cooperation, which has been spread and implemented for decades, also facilitates the game of right-wing populist and petty-bourgeois demagogy. After the trade union bureaucracy and the social democracy (and ultimately also the Left Party) have repeatedly preached the balance, and thus also the cooperation between the classes, after the works councils and the trade union leaders are closely linked to "their" large companies, the question naturally arises as to what is wrong with an alliance with the "rebellious" small businessmen, with the "angry citizens", when "democracy" and "human rights" are at stake.

Behind the rather coincidental leading figures of "Lateral Thinking 711" such as the IT entrepreneur Michael Ballweg or the petty-bourgeois "Democratic Resistance", the organized right-wing AfD, NPD or the Identitarian Movement openly flock together at the demos. Random figures like Ballweg or the original initiators of the "Hygiene" demos are quickly pushed aside by them, as could already be observed week after week in Berlin. The reactionary, violent dynamics and danger is also evident in the attack on a ZDF camera team on the fringes of the right-wing demonstration on May 2 in Berlin. Police are currently puzzling over whether the attack was carried out by right-wing or left-wing "extremists". In any case, it is undisputed that this action had an objectively reactionary character and, whether carried out by "real" right-wingers or by completely stupid idiots, can only benefit irrationalist, populist and fascist forces.

But there is another danger from these demonstrations. Representatives of the employers' associations take up the calls for "fundamental rights", "democracy" and "freedom" in order to mobilise against the restriction of production, trade and services. The freedom of profit comes first - and the capitalists stage themselves in Trump style as the real representatives of the people. Behind the democratic façade, therefore, there is a hodgepodge of reactionary interests, both capitalist and petty-bourgeois, which leave their mark on the actions.

How closely these "people's protests" are oriented to the prevailing capital interests is shown at the same time by how differently the Stuttgart demonstration, in particular, was treated in comparison to leftist actions under the Corona conditions. In Frankfurt/Main, dozens of demonstrators were arrested on May 1 for allegedly violating conditions. The Berlin Revolutionary First May Demonstration could only be carried out against a massive police presence and the repressive policies of the Senate - and only temporarily. Cops beat and thrashed the demonstrators, among others a camera assistant of the ZDF was injured. At the Stuttgarter Wasen, 4,000-5,000 people were allowed to listen to petty-bourgeois reactionary outpourings undisturbed while drinking beer and enjoying the popular festival atmosphere.

The class-struggle and radical left

The DGB unions were a total failure. Strikes like the one at Voith in Sonthofen show that it is possible to fight, even in corona times, to prevent strike breakdowns or the attempted removal of machines. With their passivity, the union headquarters also shamefully let these colleagues down.

A few militant administrative offices and leftist trade union federations such as the "Vereinigung kämpferischer GewerkschafterInnen" (VKG), ver.di activists in the health sector or the Internationalism Working Group of IG Metall Berlin saved the honour of the movement on 1 May. Together with these forces, the radical, class struggle, anti-capitalist, anti-racist and internationalist left played a very positive role this time.

Due to the numerous, though often smaller, actions, it is difficult to estimate the total number of participants. But nationwide there were well over 10,000, also clearly more than the right could mobilise. Thus, dozens of left-wing rallies took place in cities like Berlin on May 1st, including one of the VKG on Alexanderplatz or a very impressive one in front of the Vivantes Clinic at Urbanhafen. The numerous actions throughout the Federal Republic of Germany made it clear that a large part of the politically heterogeneous "radical" left is united by the need to become active in the current situation. On 1 May, the focus was not only on health and the economic crisis, but also on many facets of the current situation. Racism, deportations and a shift to the right, the situation of young people and especially of schoolchildren, anti-militarism and anti-sexism as well as the necessity to fight against climate change were recurring thematic components of the rallies.

Of course, the curtailment of democratic rights, increasing authoritarianism and the undermining of the right to demonstrate were also sharply criticised. But the left-wing rallies linked this with progressive goals, with the interests of wage earners and the oppressed, with movements such as the women's strikes of recent years, Fridays for Future and the climate justice movement - and often also with a criticism of capitalism as an exploitative system and the necessity of fighting for a socialist social order. In short, they were qualitatively different from the reactionary marches, indeed they represented their counterparts.

The 10,000 or more activists visible in these rallies and demos represent an important class-struggle, anti-capitalist potential. It has an important political significance in the next period in the struggle against the effects of the crisis. It is important to become aware of these possibilities, tasks and political responsibility.

In view of the historical crisis of capitalism that is currently unfolding, there is also a threat of historical

attacks on the working class that can only be fended off through mass actions - occupations, strikes, even political general strikes. The activists who were in the streets on May Day expressed this necessity more or less consciously. They also signalled that they are ready to fight despite repression and restrictions.

Use the potential - build up the anti-crisis movement!

These are good conditions for further actions. On the other hand, we have to keep in mind that although this layer can fall back on a much larger number of sympathizers, overall it represents a minority, albeit a considerable one, in the class.

It can demonstrate its potential in the coming months if it takes and continues the political initiative it started to show on the first of May. For this, the demonstrators and their sympathisers must become an organised force, the core of a movement. To do this, they must be united on the ground in anti-crisis alliances and in building the network of militant trade unionists.

We need such structures in order to build up a mass movement against the effects of the crisis locally, regionally, nationally and internationally - a movement that mobilizes itself, defends democratic rights, and builds up basic structures in the district and at work, at university or at school. The militant minority that was in the streets on May Day could be an initiator of such a movement and at the same time form a force that forces the mass organisations of the class, the trade unions, reformist parties to take action, or by calling for joint action draws more and more members of these organisations into the movement.

The building of an anti-crisis movement, of anti-crisis alliances is currently a task for the whole left - it must be tackled or the potential of May Day is in danger of being wasted.

At the same time, the acute character of the crisis requires a discussion beyond alliances. It raises the question of a political, revolutionary programme of the working class that links the struggle against pandemic and crisis with that against capitalism. The task of revolutionaries is to understand the building of a movement against the crisis and the building of a revolutionary party not as opposites but as interdependent and fruitful goals. Let's get down to business!

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