

City authorities in Frankfurt, Germany ban Occupy protest

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The city of Frankfurt am Main imposed a complete ban on the “Blockupy” protests scheduled to take place from Wednesday to Saturday this week. The ban represents an unprecedented attack on democratic rights.

The alliance behind the protest, associated with the Occupy movement, planned to carry out blockades in the city of Frankfurt. The alliance is headed by the Left Party and the Attac movement, but also has the support of the public sector Verdi union, the Young Greens, anti-fascist organisations, the Occupy Frankfurt group and host of other organisations.

Blockupy had planned a series of events. The protests were to begin on Wednesday evening with a musical titled “Rave against the system”; on Thursday, there were plans to occupy the banking district in Frankfurt; and a blockade was planned for Friday. A number of smaller events such as discussion forums were also on the agenda. The protest was due to culminate on Saturday with an international demonstration at which the organisers expected tens of thousands to attend.

All of the events were banned by the city of Frankfurt last week. Initially, an exception was made for the demonstration on Saturday, but then, this was also banned by councilor Markus Frank (Christian Democratic Union—CDU).

Frank justified the ban by arguing that the protest represented a threat to public safety and order. He immediately received the backing of the state government. The Hessian interior minister, Boris Rhein (CDU), said that an “orgy of violence by leftist offenders” was to be expected. He referred to a demonstration in late March involving thousands of participants, when a handful had resorted to violence, proclaiming: “The same clientele of March 31 will return.”

In order to ensure that this “clientele” does not return, the city of Frankfurt issued more than 400 bans on individual citizens whose personal details had been taken at the March demonstration. They are forbidden from entering the centre of Frankfurt from Wednesday morning until Sunday evening. This is despite the fact that it is unclear whether these persons are guilty of any sort of offence.

According to the terms of the banning order, the Occupy camp set up in front of the building of the European Central Bank is to be evacuated on Wednesday morning. The camp has been tolerated up until now, but the city is using the pretext of possible violence to authorise the police to shut it down.

Public infrastructure is also affected by the ban. Subway stations in the city centre have been closed, street cars rerouted, and additional stations can be closed “on demand”. These measures were also justified on the basis of fears of violence.

Most of the prohibitions introduced by the city have been confirmed by the Frankfurt Administrative Court. In its ruling on Monday, the court gave permission for the “rave” on Wednesday and the demonstration on Saturday, but only on the basis of stringent regulations. The ban against the demonstration could be immediately reinstated if protesters defy the city ban and attempt to set up blockades or occupations on Thursday or Friday. Blockupy has appealed to the state Administrative Court to reverse the bans.

The bans in Frankfurt represents an unprecedented attack on basic democratic rights and must be regarded in relation to the global crisis of capitalism and the growing resistance to the dictatorship of the financial markets worldwide.

In Spain, police broke up and dissolved a number of demonstrations on Saturday, when tens of thousands

took to the streets of several cities to protest against the austerity policies of the government on the first anniversary of the “outraged” protests. The police broke up the demonstrations to prevent the emergence of the tent cities set up a year ago.

In many other countries, millions of people have demonstrated against the austerity programmes of the European Union (EU), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and their own governments. Despite its political limitations, the Occupy movement has won support in many countries because it established a forum for popular protests against the banks.

Germany has so far not seen protests on as large a scale as those in Spain, Greece, and elsewhere. Nevertheless, millions of people in Germany are affected by unemployment, poverty, starvation wages, and a complete lack of prospects. The ruling elite fear that the growing anger and dissatisfaction with the status quo could develop in a manner that can no longer be controlled by the trade unions or even the police and security agencies.

The reaction of the SPD and the Greens to the bans in Frankfurt is characteristic for their right-wing politics. The Greens govern the city of Frankfurt in a coalition with the CDU. The party is verbally committed to the right to demonstrate, but in practice its position is very different.

Local Green Party leader Manuel Stock called the decision for the ban “unfortunate and regrettable”. The Green group in the city council obviously feels left out of the prohibition process because the CDU had not consulted it in advance of announcing the bans.

Two executive members of the Greens, Martina Feldmayer and Omid Nouripour, called for renewed negotiations between Blockupy and the city—well aware that the CDU would never agree to such a demand. The only alternative proposed by the council—that demonstrators could protest against the banks in the woods surrounding the city—was nothing less than a provocation.

In a press release, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) said the basic right to demonstrate was “an indispensable element of our free democratic order”. According to the SPD, this “indispensable element” categorically commits the organisers to ensuring against any violence during the protests. Under conditions where the police are certain to intervene

with force against protesters, this proviso provides the basis for the banning of all and any future protests.

Both the SPD and the Greens have been in the forefront of implementing austerity policies in Germany at both a federal and local level. Both parties have expressed their support for the so-called debt brake, which commits states and the federal governments to undertake drastic savings in Germany and throughout Europe. These attacks on broad layers of the population are increasingly incompatible with basic democratic rights. The shifting of the economic and financial crisis onto the working class and the destruction of democratic rights are two sides of the same coin.

At the same time, the Greens, the SPD, and their backers do everything in their power to protect the privileges of the political and finance elite. This accounts for their hysterical reaction to the planned two-day occupation by Blockupy of Frankfurt’s banking district. As one reader of the local *Frankfurter Rundschau* newspaper aptly commented: “When capitalists rob the people, it’s called ‘business’! When people resist it’s called ‘violence’!”



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