

Germany: Police close down Frankfurt Occupy camp

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On August 6, police forcibly evicted those taking part in the Occupy action in front of the headquarters of the European Central Bank in the German city of Frankfurt-Main.

Protesters established a campsite in front of the building nearly 10 months ago. The site's closure is part of the attack on democratic rights that included a judicial ban in May on so-called Blockupy protests held in Frankfurt. Last week, the police shut down an Occupy camp in Düsseldorf, and similar raids are planned in other cities.

Occupy activists had appealed against the eviction at the Frankfurt Administrative Court and announced they would use all legal means to prevent the closure of their camp. In the case of forcible eviction, they declared: "We will carry out passive resistance, creative action, with civil disobedience. We are not calling for criminal offences of any kind and reject any type of violence. We ask all participants to adhere to this consensus".

On August 6, the Administrative Court dismissed the appeal. Prior to the ruling's publication, the city administration permitted the police to gather in front of the camp and seal it off completely, without giving the activists any chance to take further legal steps against eviction. A court spokesman declined to give further details about the date of notification of the judgment. In May, the same court had banned all political meetings within the framework of the Blockupy protest, arguing that a ban was necessary to prevent violent clashes.

Activists awaiting the court ruling were suddenly confronted with a large number of police. Units garbed in body armour and helmets jumped from a long

convoy of police personnel carriers and surrounded the camp within minutes. Sympathisers of the protesters chanted, "Shame on you, shame on you", and dozens of passersby, evidently stunned by the events, stopped and expressed their anger at the violent police intervention.

The camp was evacuated in May for several days. During this time the Blockupy protests—involving numerous demonstrations, meetings, group discussions and cultural events—were banned, together with the announced symbolic occupation of the city's financial district. Four hundred people, allegedly known to the police, were prevented from entering the city, ostensibly to prevent an "orgy of violent leftist offenders" (Hessian interior minister Boris Rhein).

After the four days of the Blockupy protests, activists rebuilt the camp they had set up between the European Central Bank and the City Theatre. Since then, camp activists have negotiated the future of the camp with Markus Frank, Christian Democrat Union (CDU) councillor and co-ordinator with the Frankfurt magistrate's office. Following four rounds of negotiations, Frank ordered the closure of the camp, although activists had asserted that they would meet all the demands made.

Frank accused the activists of hygiene offences, unacceptable conditions and alcoholism. He also complained that the activists housed Sinti and Roma from Romania, who had been refused accommodation by the city of Frankfurt. Frank also said the financial district had received many complaints relating to security fears. According to the online edition of the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Frank "communicated a standpoint, which presented the losers in this crisis, in

accord with the views of the many winners in this recession, as scum”.

Frank implemented the magistrate’s orders on behalf of the city administration—a coalition of the right-wing CDU and the Greens. In March, the CDU, Green, Social Democratic Party (SDP), Free Democratic Party, Free Voters and Pirates factions all adopted a resolution entitled “Violence has no place in political debate”, which provided the political and legal justification for the ban on protests in May.

When Frank announced the banning of Blockupy, the leader of the Greens in Frankfurt, Manuel Stock, criticised the decision as “unfortunate and regrettable”. The Green deputy mayor, Olaf Cunitz, claimed he was not informed in advance and surprised by the decision. The Greens, however, were not willing to risk a conflict with the CDU and defend the Occupy camp.

City mayor Peter Feldmann (SPD), who won office in March after 17 years of CDU rule, refused to comment for some time. He responded to the Occupy activists’ urgent appeal to the Administrative Court with the words: “It is obvious that initial judicial clarification is awaited”. Feldmann could have prevented the eviction but refused to do so, and the camp was immediately evacuated after the court’s first judgment.



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