

Massive police mobilization against anti-austerity protest in Frankfurt, Germany

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German police launched a massive crackdown on protests against austerity in Europe on Wednesday. Between 10,000 and 20,000 people in Frankfurt participated in a demonstration that coincided with the opening of the new headquarters of the European Central Bank (ECB).

Sixty buses from 39 European cities came to Frankfurt for the rally. A special train from Berlin brought almost 900 demonstrators.

Police responded with a massive deployment of 8,000 officers, the largest mobilization in the history of the Frankfurt security forces. They completely blocked off the new, €1.3 billion (\$1.4 billion) ECB building, ringed it with barbed wire and transformed the entire city into a high-security area.

Police ran identity checks throughout the city the night before the protest, and numerous buses carrying demonstrators were stopped and searched by police.

Police fired tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets against groups of protesters on the way to the central demonstration locations. Clashes broke out as protesters set police cars alight. According to organizers, at least 130 demonstrators were injured, while police reported that 15 officers were injured in scuffles or by stones thrown by protesters.

Police carried out mass arrests—350 people by noon, according to a police spokeswoman. On Uhlandstraße, police surrounded about 200 demonstrators, mostly Italians, and checked their papers. Police repeatedly attacked the surrounded demonstrators with pepper spray.

At 2:00 pm, the Frankfurt Fire Department reported that there were 47 fires. It was reported that there were attacks on fire trucks.

Protesters held up signs that read “European Monetary Fascism” or “Caviar for All,” protesting the

leading role of the ECB in imposing austerity in Europe, particularly in the indebted euro zone countries of southern Europe such as Greece, Spain and Italy. The ECB has cut credit to these countries’ banks and governments, citing the global economic crisis and their high indebtedness, causing a credit crunch and forcing them to apply for bailouts. The bailouts have been made conditional on deep cuts in social programs that have reduced tens of millions of people to poverty.

The organizations designing these cuts—the so-called “troika” consisting of the ECB, the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—are widely hated across Europe.

“It’s important to be here and show that the troika’s policies are not being done in our name,” said Judith, a 30-year-old protester. “We can’t always make cuts at poor people’s expense and call them lazy Greeks, but we need to stand by in solidarity with them.”

The opening of the bank itself appears to have been a debacle, with ECB chief Mario Draghi speaking to only 19 invited guests. The Hessen state’s economy minister, Tarek Al-Wazir of the Green Party, and Frankfurt’s Social Democratic Party Mayor Peter Feldmann spoke, while media representatives were largely excluded.

“People are going through very hard times,” Draghi noted blandly in his official remarks, saying that the ECB had become a “focal point” for public anger. “That may not be a fair charge—our action has been aimed precisely at cushioning the shocks suffered by the economy,” Draghi claimed.

“We must listen very carefully to what all our citizens are saying,” he added.

Draghi’s democratic posturing is a pack of lies. In fact, European officials have repeatedly stressed that they intend to continue ruthlessly imposing austerity in

complete defiance of popular opposition. After the election of a government led by the pseudo-left Syriza party in Greece, which campaigned on the basis of promises to end EU austerity policies in that country, EU officials have said that they intend to continue with austerity demands in defiance of election results.

German Foreign Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, one of the leaders in the European austerity drive, bluntly stated: “Elections change nothing... There can be no democratic choice against European treaties.”

The only way forward to fight the EU austerity diktat is to mobilize the working class internationally in a struggle for socialism. The bankruptcy of attempts to resolve the crisis on a capitalist basis has been exposed by the abject capitulation of Syriza to the EU’s austerity demands.

Shortly after its election victory in January, having campaigned on the basis of pledges to end austerity, Syriza declared its readiness to negotiate new social cuts in Greece with the ECB and the other European institutions.

While the Frankfurt protest reflects broader opposition to austerity in Germany and throughout Europe, the perspective of the protest organizers themselves offers no way forward and is not, in fact, opposed to austerity.

The demonstration was organized by the “Blockupy Alliance,” founded in 2012, which includes unions, pseudo-left groups such as the Attac antiglobalisation movement, and the German Left Party. It was also supported by Syriza in Greece and its Spanish ally, the Podemos Party.

Podemos and the Left Party have both hailed Syriza’s agreements with the EU to continue imposing austerity measures against the working class. On February 27, for the first time, the German Left Party voted in favor of an extension of the EU-led financial bailout for Greece, which is responsible for the social devastation of the country and will allow the ECB to continue imposing austerity measures.

The deputy president of the Left Party fraction in parliament, Sahra Wagenknecht, summed up the perspective of the organizers of the demonstration. “The ECB could put the whole of Europe on a sustainable course of growth and combat deflation without using up the savings of the middle class, producing new speculative bubbles or fueling a global

currency war,” said Wagenknecht, who spoke at the demonstration.

The Left Party and its allies across Europe, including Syriza, are seeking only to secure tactical shifts in the policy of the EU and euro zone institutions such as the ECB. As Syriza’s sudden repudiation of its pledges to end austerity makes clear, this is a dead end for the working class.



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