

# G20 protest participants speak out against police crackdown

**Our reporters**  
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A major demonstration against the G20 summit took place in Hamburg Saturday as the leaders of the world's 20 major powers met just a few kilometres away. Around 60,000 people marched from Deichtorplatz near the central train station to Heiliggeistfeld. Following brutal police attacks against peaceful demonstrators, the issue of police violence dominated the demonstration.

Jesse and Cosvin reported on how aggressively the police had dealt with youth. The two school students are just 15 years old but have attended several demonstrations over recent days. "Yesterday, for example, we were at a peaceful 'youth against the G20' demonstration, which escalated due to the police because they beat us away with batons, claiming we were standing in the way," Jesse said. In his opinion, the violence was initiated chiefly by the police.

Cosvin agreed. At the demonstration, the police suddenly yelled, "Out of the way!" and then cleared the street. "They didn't even give the protesters a second to get out of the way, but started striking us immediately. I mean, people were pushing from behind so you can't retreat, and then they attack." Cosvin thought it was an unnecessary provocation that the police used water cannon at the youth demonstration. "It could have been avoided," the student said. "This is always portrayed differently on television," she added.

Jesse added that he could barely sleep over recent days due to the constant sound of police helicopters. Although they opposed the police violence and the constant presence of the security forces, they were not surprised by it.

Things were quite different for Gero. The self-employed IT specialist drove from Essen to take part in the protest in order to demonstrate against police violence. He took this decision spontaneously after

seeing a video of the police assault on a protest camp at Entenwerder. He had stuck a piece of paper on a plastic lid on which he had expressed his outrage in large letters, "Hamburg police: escalate until there are deaths and injuries! Violation of the constitution!"

Gero was completely taken aback by the actions of the police. For 20 years, he had "supported police activities, thought they were right, and did not believe legends that they beat demonstrators." But then he had seen "how units stormed a field, where there were 11 tents, they must have been incredibly dangerous," he commented sarcastically. The police then deployed pepper spray against the camp's residents, without any provocation.

Gero was familiar with the ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court, which declared the camp, including the tents, to be legal. "If you think it's over, the police violated a ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court with the decision they made about the gathering."

The authoritarian actions of the police, which without any inhibitions totally violated the law, was also the main issue for a group of young people who wrote on their placard, "The police chiefs of Istanbul, Riyadh and Moscow welcome their 'democratic' colleagues in Hamburg!"

Hamburg in fact currently resembles a city under siege. Twenty-nine thousand officers from all 16 states are present in the city, backed up by special forces units from other European countries. Anyone walking through the city centre on Saturday, even away from the protest route, found officers and police vehicles in almost every alley.

The police have also acquired equipment which is obviously designed for civil war-style conflict. Looking out of the demonstration into the side streets, one could

see at some distance dozens of heavily-armoured police officers, masked and wearing balaclavas, and some wearing helmets. Water cannon and armoured vehicles were always at the ready. While tens of thousands of people followed the demonstration route, the city appeared like a ghost town beyond the police blockades. Not a single car drove in the side streets or those running parallel to the demonstration, and not even pedestrians were seen.

Shortly after the beginning of the demonstration, a line of police officers flanked the march on both sides. While families with children, young people and the elderly walked between them in a relaxed atmosphere, the police put on their balaclavas, and on one side even their helmets. Two, sometimes three, helicopters circled permanently over the procession, where people danced to music and laughed. The contrast between a peaceful demonstration and an omnipresent state power could hardly be greater.

For Eugen, a 75-year-old pensioner, the source of the violence was clear. On his sign, which he carried high in front of him in full view prior to the demonstration, he had written, "Those preparing violence are currently meeting in the exhibition centre." That was a reference to the summit participants, who are all responsible for "all of the misery, that exists and is growing continuously in this world," as he put it. He was "very fearful of a global war." He also blamed German policy, which has directly profited from the wars through massive arms exports.

Eugen, who formerly worked as a shipbuilder, sees the basic problem as capitalism. "One should not strive to tinker with capitalism" and seek small changes, but rather abolish it: "I don't care what it is called afterwards, but capitalism must be overcome."

But many banners expressed the hope of a united world; "peace" was one of the words most frequently visible. A common topic of discussion was that Africa, an entire continent, was entirely excluded from the G20 deliberations, which outraged many. Some hoped for a better world through closer cooperation in the United Nations. Cosvin, the 15-year-old student, appealed for a meeting of all nations, "A G194."

The enthusiastic participation of many students and youth was clear to see. Oliver, who travelled from Berlin to participate, thought this was a positive sign. The young teacher carried a sign reading, "Imagine you

need asylum and nobody helps you!" His t-shirt declared, "Refugees welcome!"

He views the G20 as a "club for the elite," who are united on most questions: Europe remains a fortress, and the US also wants to protect itself against the flow of refugees from the south. "I worry about world peace," said Oliver. However, the real conflict is not currently going on between armies, he added, but rather in society. Whether world hunger or climate change, "those who bear the brunt are the people, and this war has been waged for a long time."

Asked what can be done now, Oliver said, "I am an optimist." One only needs to look at "how many young people are here. I think that is a big statement."



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