

German police threaten climate change protesters

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Ahead of the cross-border protest for climate justice planned in the German city of Aachen on June 21, the city's police presidium has sent a letter to the organisers of Fridays for Future that can only be described as a blatant attempt to intimidate protesters.

The threatening letter, which was also sent to parents' associations, the education ministry of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany's most populous state, and district administrations in Cologne and Düsseldorf, explicitly threatened youth with a police response and criminal prosecution. The letter warned against "aggressive confrontations" and informed "disrupters" that they should expect to be kettled: groups could be "enclosed" by the police and "individuals could be taken into custody."

The letter to students, teachers, and parents, which was undoubtedly sent with the agreement of the state government and North Rhine-Westphalia's Interior Minister Herbert Reul (Christian Democrats, CDU), was also published on the police website, where it is declared in large type, "Police can also take measures against children and young people."

The provocative letter comes in the lead-up to the "Climate Justice without Borders" student strike and march planned for Friday, June 21. Some 20,000 participants are expected. School students, university students, academics, and artists from 16 countries have already announced their intention to participate in the protest in Aachen, which is located on the borders of Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

To give their threats extra weight, the police employed the tried and tested tactic of pointing the finger at an alleged "minority prepared to commit violence" in order to justify the use of ruthless violence from the outset. Based on the fact that the group "ende Gelände" is protesting the logging of the nearby

Hambacher forest by the RWE energy concern on the same weekend, the police wrote, "Keep your distance from groups ready to commit violence like 'Ende Gelände', don't allow yourselves to be instrumentalised to conduct illegal acts! Do not fall into the 'criminality trap'."

Further on in the letter, another threat is made, "The police are also obliged to protect private property rights," and the police will not hesitate to provide "those damaged" with the personal details of the culprits, as has happened in the past. In a first draft of the letter, the police even claimed that protesters in the past had been ordered to make compensation payments totaling €2.1 million. However, this false report on an ongoing legal trial, which RWE is pursuing, had to be removed by the police.

In fact, the Fridays for Future organisers have explicitly declared their solidarity with the protests against the logging of the Hambacher forest. They call for participation in a protest planned at the Garzweiler mine, and declare together with the Hambacher forest protesters on their Facebook page to make "the holiday weekend into a weekend for climate justice."

The police letter threatening all of these protests represents a frontal assault on the right to demonstrate. For several weeks, until the European elections in May, the climate protests organised by students were tolerated. But now, with the elections over, the authorities are showing their true colours and the police state is rearing its ugly head.

As in France, where the state cracked down violently against Yellow Vest protesters six months ago, German authorities are now preparing to brutally attack peaceful protests. The police are even threatening children and young people with kettling, detention, and criminal prosecutions.

The warning in the letter that young people could “fall into the ‘criminality trap’” merely by taking part in the protest is particularly revealing. This statement is entirely in keeping with the new Police Obligations Law, which criminalises under certain circumstances the mere participation in a protest, and similar laws in almost every German state. North Rhine-Westphalia’s new police law, passed in December 2018, permits people to be detained for up to 28 days for a mere suspicion that they may conduct a criminal act.

Tens of thousands have taken to the streets on several occasions to protest against the law. The letter from the Aachen police thus is not merely directed at the students who are organising the climate justice protest, but also against all workers and young people who are moving into struggle against militarism, war, and social inequality. At one stroke, it sheds light on the true balance of power, while at the same time underscoring the hopelessness of appealing to any of the bourgeois parties which keep the state running smoothly.

It is clear that there is only one way to fight for the preservation of natural resources and the basic necessities of life: young people must turn to the working class, which is the only force capable of overturning the source of this destruction: the capitalist profit system. They must take up the fight for a socialist society based on the needs of the vast majority, and not the profit interests of the banks and major corporations.



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