

Fridays for Future: Tens of thousands demonstrate on climate change in Aachen, Germany

Our reporters
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The first international mass demonstration organized by Fridays for Future, the student environmental activist group, brought together young people from 15 countries in Aachen, Germany on June 21. The protest in Germany's westernmost city, near the borders with Belgium and the Netherlands, was held under the slogan, "Climate Justice Without Borders—United for a Future." Some 40,000 students demanded a rapid shutdown of coal-fired power plants and other measures.

While all honest scientists agree that climate change is already dangerously advanced, government officials and inter-state bodies are refusing to take the necessary measures to protect the environment, instead focusing on a massive military build-up. On the eve of the demonstration, the European Union (EU) heads of state and government meeting in Brussels could not even agree to make binding the climate goal of achieving CO2 neutrality—achieving net zero carbon dioxide emissions—by 2050.

In protest, youth from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, the UK, Switzerland, Luxembourg and other countries marched through Aachen. Several "tails" of a star march led through the city to the Tivoli football stadium, where the central rally took place and where several bands and artists performed. The various and creative posters and banners included: "There is no Planet B," "The Dinos also thought they had time," "Your greed costs our future," "Climate 2050 affects us all," "Burn Capitalism not Coal," etc.

Older people also participated. Scientists, artists, teachers and workers from all over the Ruhr area and Aachen residents marched along with the youth, and a

group of seniors carried a banner saying, "Grannies for Future: We are here and outraged because our grandchildren are not being heard!" A former steel worker, who had recently worked in the chemical industry, told *Spiegel Online*, "Everyone has to earn their money, but everyone also needs to breathe and needs clean air and healthy food, so I'm marching here too."

The Socialist Equality Party and its youth organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, distributed an appeal to the participants, in which the following four principles were elaborated:

"1. The destruction of natural resources is a consequence of the profit system.

"2. Global warming and environmental degradation are part of a comprehensive crisis of global capitalism. The same crisis is leading to misery and war, but at the same time is unleashing growing resistance.

"3. The only force that can put an end to this economic system and bring about solutions for itself and for all humankind is the international working class, the vast majority of the people.

"4. We are building a world party, the Fourth International, to abolish capitalism and replace it with a socialist society that focuses on people's needs rather than profits."

These points met with great interest and sparked many discussions. For example, Thomas, a social work student, emphasized that the movement must be international. "That's very important—that it's an international movement," he said. "In one country alone, we can actually do nothing. Globalization has changed everything."

He could well understand, Thomas continued, “when people demand a revolution.” However, he thought that at the moment, this could split the movement. “It has to be carried by the masses, and we do not have them at the moment,” he commented. Thomas saw his job in supporting the protests, “We must not let up now.”

“That it cannot continue this way, all scientists agree,” said Soeren, 21, a student from Aachen. He hoped “that we can signal something with so many people.”

Soeren is studying aerospace. To him, it was important to see “that the politicians finally get that and take the people seriously.” He spoke out strongly against the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and all right-wing political tendencies. At the same time, Soeren expressed skepticism as to whether the abolition of capitalism was really possible. Maybe you had to “create financial incentives,” so that things changed in the environmental situation.

In contrast, many participants carried signs with openly anti-capitalist slogans. One man had written on his poster, “Capitalism is a system that can exist only through the exploitation of man by man, and its overproduction will make a rubbish tip out of our earth in a very short time.”

The demands of the IYSSE and the WSWS were supported by some of the participants who had travelled from France, including Alexi, 35, a communication science researcher. He stressed, “I agree with what you wrote: you cannot influence the climate unless you change the social conditions.”

Alexi said he had come to Aachen, “because climate change affects us all. We all have to become active. But we must build up a lot more pressure,” he added.

Regarding the yellow vests movement in France, Alexi said their protest were justified, because social inequality was growing more and more: “It’s just not acceptable, when the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.” The environmental questions also had something to do with this, “Climate justice has a lot to do with social equality.”

The influence of lobbyists on the corporations and banks and also on politics must be limited, Alexi added. The yellow vests supporters in France had experienced how the police behave violently against peaceful protests. “The reaction will be that more people will take to the streets.”

In Germany too, the police are increasingly acting violently against peaceful protests. Many of the participants were planning to continue to demonstrate at the nearby Garzweiler open cast coal mine, where the Rhineland lignite mining area is the largest source of CO2 in Europe.

The police had already begun to occupy and seal off the lignite mining area in a huge exercise. An officially registered protest camp of the “End Terrain” alliance, which organizes non-violent acts of civil disobedience, was cut off from the outside world for several hours when police sealed off the Viersen am Niederrhein rail station from train traffic.

In the run-up to the Aachen demonstration, the police authorities had also threatened students with kettling and criminal proceedings in a letter sent to all schools and parent associations. Thomas, the social work student, commented, “This is a complete outrage. The police are not neutral in this matter but represent the interests of the RWE Group [energy conglomerate]. These things are decided at the top political level.”



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