

Hundreds of thousands join protests against police violence across Europe

Our reporters
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Hundreds of thousands of workers and young people took to the streets across Europe over the weekend to protest the brutal police murder of George Floyd and police violence in general. The largest demonstrations occurred in Germany, where at least 200,000 protested in a number of major cities on Saturday.

Due to the coronavirus restrictions, organisers of the demonstrations in Germany only registered a few hundred participants in each city. But they turned out to be among the largest protests in almost two decades. Around 30,000 people marched in Berlin, compared to the 1,500 who had been officially registered. Another 30,000 joined the protest in Munich, where only 200 participants had been registered.

Young people dominated the protests. At least 20,000 marched in Hamburg and Düsseldorf, while more than 10,000 demonstrated in Cologne, Frankfurt and Hamburg. Tens of thousands more joined major protests in Stuttgart, Freiburg, Nuremberg, Dresden and many other cities. In total, protests took place in 25 cities.

The protests were organised under the hashtags #SilentDemo, #BlackLivesMatter or #SayTheirNames, a reference to the victims of the right-wing extremist terrorist attack in the German city of Hanau. Opposition to the far-right and the consolidation of neo-Nazi structures within the state apparatus played a significant role in the protests.

Most demonstrations held moments of silence lasting 8 minutes and 46 seconds, which was the length of time police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck to choke him to death.

Many immigrants who participated drew attention to the daily examples of racism they confront. Placards on many demonstrations recalled Oury Jalloh, who burnt to death while in police custody in a jail cell in 2005.

One demonstrator in Berlin carried a sign reading, "What is happiness without equality?" In Cologne, one hand-made sign read, "Respect existence or expect resistance."

The police considered dispersing the demonstrations in several cities due to the breaching of coronavirus restrictions, but ultimately decided not to do so. Although organisers repeatedly made announcements appealing to protesters to maintain a distance of 1.5 metres between each person, the large number of participants often made this impossible.

In Berlin, the police blocked streets leading to Alexanderplatz, where most protesters were gathered. Acts of violence by police occurred in Berlin and Hamburg following the peaceful protests. Eyewitnesses told the WSWs that young people were kettled in Hamburg and attacked by baton-wielding police. Water cannons were also used to clear a square. Eye witnesses reported that 36 immigrant children and young people were detained overnight.

The issue of police brutality was discussed widely on social media, with the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag used over 400,000 times on Saturday alone. Robert wrote on Twitter, "Fascism takes many forms...", and watching the rampage of the police and national guard in the United States, "It's very reminiscent of the pattern of fascism."

More than 90 arrests were made during clashes in Berlin. A video shared widely on Twitter showed an example of the violence of German police. It included the comment, "Was George Floyd not enough?"

While the largest protests took place in Germany, tens of thousands took to the streets across Europe. In Paris, over 5,000 people sought to make their way to the US embassy but were prevented from doing so by the police after the authorities banned the

demonstration. Security forces sealed off the embassy with metal barriers and roadblocks. Major protests involving thousands also occurred in Bordeaux, Lille, Rennes, Marseille and Lyon.

Félix, a social worker who assists refugees, tried to attend the Paris protest. He told the WSWs, “I arrived via Saint-Lazare to join the protest, and all the streets are blocked by the police. At each road they sent us on a bit further, so we understand that it is set up so that no one can get to the protest.

“I am concerned by this subject of police violence, and police violence above all against minority populations. It’s a movement that was launched in the United States and which has appeared here, and that is a very good thing. I want to use that to show that there are many of us united against police violence.

“The fact of the violence of the state, and a racist violence, is something that is common to France, with different forms but in any case the result is the same: It’s people being hit, killed by police, by the state supposedly defending the rule of law...”

He also spoke about the connection of the current protests to the “yellow vest” social protest movement, saying: “It’s the same fight, it’s the fight against police violence... We saw recently that these practices became more and more common. The ‘yellow vests’ showed that many people lost hands, lost eyes. It has become more common with the ‘yellow vests.’ All of it is the same phenomenon that is very worrying and that we have to fight against.”

In Britain, tens of thousands protested in London. A demonstration of at least 15,000 took place in Manchester, while large events were also reported in Sheffield (3,000), and Cardiff (1,000).

Yesterday, thousands of people gathered outside the US embassy in London for another protest. Many wore masks declaring, “Racism is a virus.”

Tens of thousands gathered in Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands, on Saturday. In Portugal, around 5,000 demonstrated in Lisbon. Outside the US embassy in Warsaw, Poland, a crowd of several hundred gathered to protest.

Protests also occurred in Italy. Around 1,000 participated in a march in Genoa on Saturday, while hundreds joined events outside the US consulates in Naples and Bari.

Protests continued yesterday in various countries. In

Copenhagen, a crowd estimated at 5,000 gathered outside the US embassy. Thousands also gathered in Rome and Madrid, where Floyd’s last words, “I can’t breathe,” were chanted by demonstrators. In the Hungarian capital Budapest, over 1,000 people attended outside the US embassy with banners including “Police everywhere, justice nowhere.”

In Gothenburg, Sweden, the police violently dispersed a protest of over 2,000 people on Sunday afternoon. “The demonstration was great. It was a peaceful demonstration,” Ali Fadurieh, a demonstrator, told *Göteborgs-Posten*. The police claimed that social distancing was not being observed to justify the crackdown, which came just four days after similar repression against a protest of over 1,000 in Stockholm.

The weekend’s demonstrations across Europe followed a massive mobilisation of 50,000 people in the Austrian capital Vienna on Thursday evening.

The size and wide geographical spread of the protests over Floyd’s murder reflect broad-based opposition to racism and police violence around the world. More fundamentally, they are being driven by pervasive state violence directed against the working class, and the poorest and most oppressed sections of society, as well as unprecedented levels of social inequality.

The concentration of vast wealth in a few hands at the top of society and the impoverishment of the vast majority is only being accelerated in every country by the policies adopted during the coronavirus pandemic. As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted in a recent perspective, the killing of George Floyd has acted as “a trigger event setting simmering class tensions alight.”



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