

Far-right demonstration in Leipzig, Germany, supported by judiciary, police and government

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11 November 2020

Around 20,000 demonstrators gathered in the centre of Leipzig on Saturday, crowded together and with most not wearing masks, to protest the German government's coronavirus restrictions. Police waited for several hours, before it officially ended the demonstration due to the crowd's non-compliance with hygiene regulations. Several thousand demonstrators then marched across the city's central ring road and attacked counter-demonstrators and journalists. The police not only permitted the mob to run riot, but they also actively supported them.

The so-called "Lateral Thinkers" demonstration in the city centre had been approved by the Saxon Higher Administrative Court in Bautzen just a few hours before the demo began. Previously, the Leipzig Administrative Court only allowed a demonstration to take place on the expansive grounds of the exhibition centre situated on the outskirts of the city.

Based on the experience of previous similar demonstrations in Berlin and Konstanz, it was evident that neo-Nazis and right-wing extremists throughout Germany would mobilise for the Leipzig demo and that participants would ignore the government's pandemic regulations. Nevertheless, the higher court made a conscious decision to allow protesters to gather in the narrow confines of the city centre, thereby providing a prominent arena for COVID-19 deniers and right-wing extremists.

In so doing, the court had the full support of the police in the state of Saxony. Numerous videos, photos and eyewitness reports currently circulating on the Internet show how demonstrators defied all constraints under the benevolent eyes of the police. Several videos document policemen in patrol cars lifting their thumbs in solidarity with demonstrators.

When demonstrators tossed pyrotechnics, firecrackers

and other projectiles at the police to force their way through to the Leipzig ring road, the police did nothing to stop them. Instead they withdrew step by step. This is also documented on video.

For their part, those taking part in a counter-demo were harassed and surrounded by the police. In the Connewitz district of the city, two water cannons were used the same evening to disperse left-wing activists who allegedly threw stones at the windows of a police station and ignited incendiary devices.

Several journalists were physically attacked by the far-right demonstrators, with some suffering significant injuries. Again, the police did nothing to protect the journalists, but rather participated in the attacks. At least 38 media representatives were prevented from carrying out their work, according to the journalists' union DJU. Nine cases of obstruction stemmed from the hostile intervention of police officers. "Compared to the anti-Corona demonstrations in Berlin, for example, we saw a completely new dimension yesterday in terms of the extent of violence," said DJU Chairwoman Tina Groll.

The German Journalists' Association DJV also protested against police harassment. "More than once journalists in Leipzig were prevented from reporting by police forces. There was no justification whatsoever for this," said DJV Federal Chairman Frank Überall. He said it was scandalous that a journalist had been threatened with police custody and the withdrawal of his press card.

Both Leipzig's police commissioner, Torsten Schulze, and Saxony's interior minister, Roland Wöllner (CDU), gave the police their unreserved support. Using violence against the right-wing demonstrators was "not appropriate," Schulze said: "You don't fight a pandemic with police measures, but rather by appealing to reason."

At a joint video press conference with Saxony state

premier Michael Kretschmer (also CDU), Wöller said on Sunday: “To accuse the police of having failed is incorrect and completely absurd. We fully support our police officers who are doing an excellent job.” No questions were allowed at the press conference.

Wöller did not mention the violent acts carried out by demonstrators, the attacks on journalists and the highly visible presence of neo-Nazis, members of the Identitarian movement and other right-wing extremists. Instead, he railed at length against the “left-wing rioters” in Connewitz, claiming that the anti-restriction demonstration consisted primarily of pensioners and children.

“No matter how many police officers accompanied the assembly,” he said, “a violent dissolution of a peaceful assembly was and is not at issue, because what would be the alternative? Use of force against seniors or water cannons against children? Freedom of expression is a fundamental right that must be protected.”

The support of the judiciary, police and government for the coronavirus deniers and right-wing extremists in Leipzig was so blatant that several leading politicians felt forced to express their reservations. Particularly the SPD and the Greens, who govern in a coalition with the notoriously right-wing CDU in Saxony, were nervous because they have been thoroughly exposed.

Germany’s justice minister, Christine Lambrecht (SPD), demanded “thorough clarification.” She said that such incidents could “never be justified,” and that freedom of demonstration was “not freedom to use violence and massively endanger others.” The deputy premier of Saxony, Martin Dulig (SPD), complained that the state had “let itself be led by the nose in Leipzig.” The Greens, who also fill the post of a deputy premier in the state, even demanded Wöller’s resignation.

This is all aimed, however, at covering their own political tracks. In reality, the coronavirus policy of the federal and state governments, which is supported by all parties including the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party, is itself criminal in its character. Although the number of infections and victims is exploding, schools, daycare centres and businesses remain open without adequate protective measures, meaning the virus can spread at breakneck speed in crowded rooms and overcrowded public transport. Profits have priority over human lives.

Where this leads to can be seen clearly in France, where the number of new infections on a daily basis rose to almost 87,000 last Saturday and 40,000 have already died of COVID-19. Germany is only two to three weeks

behind the developments in France.

Some restrictions have been imposed by the government and federal states at the start of November limited to the private domain, thereby threatening the very existence of hospitality, entertainment and service industries, most of which fail to receive any of the promised official financial support. The lion’s share of the government’s financial aid flows instead to the big corporations and banks.

Right-wing extremist elements are exploiting the resulting desperation for their own purposes, although they lack any support among broad layers of the population. Those taking part in the Leipzig demonstration were transported from all over Germany at considerable expense. The aim of the protest was to intimidate opponents of the governments’ criminal corona policy and prepare a further loosening of protective measures, even if comes at the cost of tens of thousands of lives.

The state and government’s support for the far-right Leipzig demonstration underscores once again that the fight against the devastating health and social consequences of the coronavirus pandemic requires an independent political movement by the working class. The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) is calling for the establishment of rank-and-file action committees in factories and schools that operate completely independently of the parties in the Bundestag and the trade unions to form networks on both a national and international basis.

These committees must organise the measures necessary to protect the population against the virus and prepare a general strike. Their demands cannot be based on what the corporations and parties consider to be affordable, but rather on what is necessary to secure the lives and well-being of children, youth, teachers and the entire working class.



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