

Police in Germany clear streets to protect illegal demo by far-right coronavirus deniers

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Up to 20,000 right-wing extremists and COVID-19 deniers marched through the Hessian city of Kassel on Saturday, attacking journalists and terrorising those opposing the demonstration. Police reacted by not only allowing the fascist mob to proceed, they cleared the streets for the illegal march and brutally attacked counter-demonstrators. They clearly sought to intimidate anyone who supports social distancing rules under conditions where infection figures in Germany are rising exponentially.

Arguing on the basis of health considerations, a court decided that a single rally of 6,000 participants could take place outside the city centre. Thousands of demonstrators defied this legal requirement and marched in a number of different columns toward the city centre. They refused to respect the requirement to wear masks or the minimum distance recommendations.

Demonstrators carried placards with slogans such as “End the lockdown” or “Take off the masks.” Many participants carried German flags, imperial flags or—as is usual at xenophobic Pegida demonstrations—the flags of the federal states from which they had travelled. Also on display were the identification badges of right-wing extremist organisations such as the Third Way party or the Q-Anon conspiracy group. The victims of National Socialism were mocked by persons wearing yellow stars and carrying portraits of the prominent victim of the Nazi holocaust, Anne Frank.

In the run-up to the demonstration, the far-right milieu had mobilised for the Kassel demo throughout Germany and Europe. Appeals were made in far-right forums to “explore the city centre” and not comply with health protection measures.

The demonstrators moved through the city centre from noon onwards and assembled at the city’s central

Friedrichplatz, where they remained for the afternoon. The last of the demonstrators were only dispersed by police at around 7 p.m. For the rest of the day the demonstrators were able to move through the city centre largely unmolested. Police only resorted to the use of batons and tear gas when they were directly attacked with stones and bottles.

In the city centre, demonstrators not only endangered the health of residents and passers-by, they also repeatedly attacked journalists and counter-demonstrators. One video shows the photojournalist Felix Dressler being knocked down by a demonstrator. A camera team from Hessian Radio was also attacked and many other reporters were threatened.

Numerous videos on social media also document how right-wing demonstrators beat people who peacefully stood in the way of the illegal marches with their bicycles. The Left Party reported that one of its members, Ali Timtik, was a victim of racial insults and was injured so badly by punches and pepper spray that he had to be taken to hospital for emergency care.

The right-wing thugs were often supported by the police to the applause of the pandemic deniers. A video shows a police officer brutally pulling a young woman from the road and then hitting her head with force against the handlebars of her bike. The woman fell to the ground. Other videos show police officers being cheered by the right-wing extremists as they drag counter-demonstrators away and beat them, thereby freeing the path for the far-right mob.

A picture widely shared on social media shows a uniformed policewoman making a heart gesture in solidarity with the Corona deniers. In addition to Hessian police officers, police units from North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate and Thuringia, which is governed by the Left Party, were involved in the

operation.

Following the operation on Saturday evening, a spokesperson for the police stated that they had deliberately not intervened following consultation with all of the relevant authorities. Even though the “vast majority” of the demonstrators “neither complied with police dispersal orders nor observed hygiene or distance rules,” the police had not intervened in order to avoid a “not inconsiderable number of injuries on all sides.”

Despite the contradiction between this claim and the brutal scenes of violence throughout the day, the police spokesperson went on to explain: “The participants apparently came predominantly from the political (bourgeois) centre and on the whole tended not to show any recognisable tendency towards violent actions.”

This glorification of the right-wing demonstration was supported by leading politicians. The parliamentary secretary of the CDU faction in the Hessian state parliament, Holger Bellino, defended the actions of the police, saying: “We thank our police for their commitment and the consistent crackdown.” The mayor of Kassel, Christian Geselle (SPD), said on Sunday: “From my point of view, one cannot criticise the police on the spot.”

Some politicians have since called for clarification of what took place and have feebly criticised the police operation in order to dampen down the angry response on social media to the police tactics, based on the available videos and pictures.

In fact, all of the parties involved in the meeting on Monday between the federal and state governments agreed they would resist taking genuinely effective lockdown measures to contain new, highly dangerous COVID-19 variants. Although businesses and schools are among the main drivers of the pandemic, industrial production is to be maintained without any restrictions and schools will remain open so that parents can go to work. Corporate profits are placed before the lives and health of workers.

To enforce these policies, Germany’s main political parties and the media have long relied on the mobilisation of far-right forces, such as those who rallied in Kassel. Since the beginning of the pandemic, such protests have received excessive media attention and, like the prior xenophobic Pegida marches, have been glorified as protests by “concerned citizens.”

The right-wing extremists’ links to the state apparatus, so evident on Saturday, are well documented. Especially in the state of Hesse, numerous neo-Nazi networks in the police have been uncovered in recent years. One such network sent threatening letters to leftist lawyers, journalists and politicians calling itself the “NSU 2.0.” Its activities were then covered up at the highest level.

Kassel is also the city where district president Walter Lübcke was murdered by a member of the militant neo-Nazi milieu which has been active there since the 1990s and has been heavily penetrated by Germany’s domestic intelligence agency the Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

Large demonstrations by pandemic deniers have been repeatedly organised whenever the government’s policy of opening up the economy and society has been met with growing resentment. Meanwhile, almost 75,000 people have died in Germany because of the “profits before lives” policy. Now, with the refusal to close businesses and schools, tens of thousands more lives are threatened. At the same time, there has been a complete failure on the part of the government to organise vaccinations and a proper testing regime. It is against this background that those who oppose the government’s course are being intimidated.

The mobilisation of the far-right dregs of society with the support of the police is a serious warning. The ruling elites are prepared to go to extreme lengths in order to impose their policy of protecting profits. They can only be stopped by the mobilisation of the working class in a Europe-wide general strike. The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) is fighting for this perspective in the upcoming federal elections.



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