

Nationwide crackdown on “Last Generation” climate activists in Germany

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On Tuesday morning, heavily armed police units searched the homes of 11 members of the climate activist group “Last Generation” in a nationwide raid. The public prosecutor’s office in Neuruppin, Brandenburg, had ordered the house searches.

Chief public prosecutor Cyrill Klement announced that the investigations were being conducted by the political department of his office, on “suspicion of forming or supporting a criminal organisation, disrupting public services, trespassing and coercion.”

The background to the investigation is apparently several protest actions by the climate activists against the Brandenburg oil refinery PCK Schwedt in the spring of this year. At that time, members of the group had, among other things, turned off emergency valves of a crude oil pipeline leading from Rostock to Schwedt. The action only temporarily interrupted operations but did not harm anyone. It was a form of civil disobedience, but not a criminal offence.

The police action took place only a few days after the large-scale raid against a comprehensive right-wing terrorist network of the so-called *Reichsbürger*, which reaches deep into the German armed forces, the state security apparatus, and social elites.

The house raids on climate activists are intended to criminalise peaceful protest and distract from the extent of the fascist threat in Germany. They show that the tightening of internal security laws is not directed against the right, but against oppositional youth and workers. Peaceful protest, civil disobedience and other forms of resistance are to be criminalised and intimidated.

Carla Hinrichs, one of the spokespersons for the climate protest group, confirmed that her flat, among others, was searched. At a spontaneous demonstration in Berlin-Kreuzberg on Tuesday evening, she said it

was already “very scary when the police ransack your wardrobe.” It frightened her, but she would not be intimidated by it, she said. “What I cannot accept is that our government is trying to silence us,” Hinrichs told the dpa press agency. “The criminalisation of peaceful protest is an attack on all of us,” she stressed.

In contrast, the parliamentary domestic policy spokesperson of the Greens and former police officer Irene Mihalic said about the raid against the climate activists: “We take the accusations made very seriously, and they must be fully investigated. The responsible public prosecutor’s office and the police must now investigate accordingly. We will certainly also deal with the issue in the [parliamentary] Domestic Affairs Committee at an appropriate time.”

The action against the “Last Generation” group is reminiscent of conditions in the Weimar Republic in the 1920s, when the judiciary ruthlessly prosecuted opponents of war such as Carl von Ossietzky and communists. At the same time, right-wing perpetrators of violence and Nazis—such as the murderers of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, and Hitler after the failed putsch of 1923—were spared or received petty sentences.

Paragraph 129 of the German Criminal Code, on which the prosecution of the climate activists is being based, stands in this tradition. From 1871 to 1945, it was directed against any “association hostile to the state.” Under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, it was used to persecute social democrats in the 19th century and, after the First World War, the German Communist Party (KPD). In the 1950s, KPD members who only a few years earlier had been released from the Nazi concentration camps were again confronted with this paragraph. It was used in the 1950s and 1960s to prosecute opponents of rearmament and actual or

alleged supporters of the KPD, which was banned in 1956.

Legally, the investigations against the climate activists are baseless. Legal Tribune Online quotes Tübingen constitutional law professor Jochen von Bernstorff saying that even “disruptive forms of protest are generally protected by the fundamental right to freedom of assembly.” Von Bernstorff points out that the debate is not new. He recalls the sit-ins against nuclear reprocessing and final storage sites in the 1980s and protests in front of US barracks against nuclear rearmament in the so-called hot autumn of 1983.

At that time, leading intellectuals such as the writers Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, Walter Jens, the theologian Helmut Gollwitzer and Otto Schily (who later became SPD interior minister) took part in sit-ins against the NATO Double-Track Decision, which contained a threat to deploy more medium-range nuclear weapons in Western Europe.

But since then, criminal law has been systematically tightened. As early as 1976, Paragraph 129 was supplemented by Paragraph 129a, which makes the formation, membership, and support of a “terrorist organisation” as well as promoting it a punishable offence. Terrorist attacks by the Red Army Faction (RAF) and the 2nd June Movement served as justification.

Implementing regulations of the Criminal Procedure Code associated with section 129a represent an unprecedented encroachment on the democratic rights of defendants and defence lawyers. They allow pre-trial detention on mere suspicion, restrict visiting and postal traffic of detainees, allow control of postal traffic between defence counsel and clients, and prohibit defence counsel from representing several defendants at the same time.

Solitary confinement can be imposed after a conviction under section 129a, which violates the United Nations Convention on Human Rights and has earned Germany multiple complaints from Amnesty International, the UN Human Rights Committee and the European Parliament. In addition, section 129a offers the possibility of extensive police surveillance and the elimination of data protection regulations.

The more fiercely popular resistance to war, inflation and social devastation develops, the more the powers of a police state are being heightened. In Bavaria at the

beginning of November, the police put 12 climate activists in preventive detention because they had glued themselves to the Stachus square in the city centre and obstructed traffic for an hour and a half. This Tuesday, coinciding with the raids, Bavarian judges confirmed the weeks of preventive detention.

The actions against “Last Generation” clearly show the ruthlessness with which those in power will act against any resistance that really threatens their interests. “Last Generation” advocates extremely limited political demands that do not challenge the capitalist profit system, the cause of environmental destruction—calling for a general speed limit of 100 kilometres per hour on motorways, a law against food waste, a €9 ticket covering local and regional travel.

The group does not address itself to working people, who are most affected by the devastating consequences of climate change, but to governments. It seeks to put them under pressure with spectacular protest actions that are meant to attract as much media attention as possible. Its demands explicitly include a discussion with the federal government.

The group was formed a year ago when activists staged a hunger strike in Berlin’s government quarter during the federal election. It demanded talks with the three candidates for chancellor from the Christian Democrats (CDU), Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens and “immediate measures against the climate crisis.”

Since then, “Last Generation” has networked with similar groups in other countries, which, in addition to street blockades, also carry out spectacular attacks on works of art and other precious objects. As the WSWS pointed out in an earlier article, such actions are “misguided and reactionary in several respects.”

Criticism of the methods of “Last Generation,” which spring from a combination of despair at the devastating scale of the climate crisis and misguided politics, does not, however, justify persecution by the state. On the contrary, the group’s democratic right to freedom of expression and protest must be vigorously defended.



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