

German police launch brutal crackdown on peace demonstration in Cologne

Our reporters
31 August 2025

On September 1, 1939, World War II began with the German Wehrmacht's invasion of Poland. Eighty-six years later, the German state is once again using brutal repressive measures against demonstrators who reject its imperialist warmongering. In Cologne on Saturday, police surrounded participants in a peace demonstration, mostly teenagers and young people, for almost 11 hours.

From the outset, the police operation was geared toward a violent crackdown. This was because several thousand participants from the "Disarm Rheinmetall" camp had joined this year's demonstration organised by the Cologne Peace Forum. The camp, which is directed against the leading German arms manufacturer, was launched in 2018 by various groups and initiatives. This year, it set up its tents in a park in the centre of Cologne from August 25 to September 1.

The Cologne police tried to ban the camp in advance. However, the Higher Administrative Court (OVG) of North Rhine-Westphalia in Münster ultimately overturned the decision of the police and the Cologne Administrative Court. It ruled that the planned discussions, lectures, workshops and artistic actions posed "no danger."

The police then apparently decided to make an example of the camp. According to police reports, 1,600 police officers in heavy riot gear were deployed. Water cannons and armoured vehicles were on standby on the banks of the Rhine. Numerous groups of 10 to 15 police officers were stationed in the side streets of the rally site and along the demonstration route, ready for action.

The start of the demonstration was delayed by about an hour because the police blocked the march with a series of excuses, such as prohibited metal bars or violations of the ban on face coverings.

The march was stopped several times by the police on flimsy grounds before it was brought to a complete halt at around 6:00 p.m., about halfway along the planned route.

The police cited "attacks on officers and repeated

violations of the right of assembly" as reasons. Participants had "covered their faces, lit smoke bombs, and donned protective armour." The police attacked the so-called "revolutionary block" at the end of the demonstration with blows and pepper spray in order to separate several hundred people from the rest of the demonstrators. This alone resulted in several dozen injuries.

The loudspeaker truck was stormed, and gas and spirit bottles were allegedly found. The entire block was surrounded by hundreds of police officers. Additional police units and heavy equipment were called in. Police shock troops repeatedly forced their way into the kettled demonstrators and arbitrarily pulled out individual persons. The *Tagesschau* news program reported that the police had recorded the personal details of 524 people. According to their own statements, the police arrested one suspect for resisting arrest and took two people into custody.

A paramedic reported that one person had suffered a potentially life-threatening injury to the larynx.

A man with facial injuries told our reporters at the scene that he had been punched in the face by a police officer. After a medical examination, he was taken behind the police cordon by police officers for identification. When asked whether the perpetrator of the injury had been identified, a police officer replied that he assumed the actions of his "colleagues" were lawful and therefore did not consider it a criminal offence on the part of the police.

The police also acted violently against observers and journalists. The parliamentary observer from the Left Party was denied access. A young journalist was briefly taken into custody, even though he identified himself with his press card.

Even residents who showed solidarity and wanted to provide those trapped with water, among other things, were harassed by the police. According to observers,

medical care for injured persons was deliberately obstructed in some cases.

The non-profit association Demosanitäter reports that it treated a total of 147 people at the demonstration on Saturday (“64 x pepper spray, 52 x surgical, 16 x psychological, 15 x internal medicine, of which 13 x emergency services, 5 x hospital independently”). In the “Disarm Rheinmetall” medical camp, there were “a further 218 treatments, more than half of which were after and during the demonstration (several times by public emergency services).” The association concludes: “It can be assumed that there was a high number of unreported cases on Saturday.”

The location for kettling the demonstrators had obviously been chosen by the police well in advance. Mobile toilets had even been set up right next to the police cordon—for the police, not for the kettled demonstrators.

The police violence in Cologne is the latest escalation in the state apparatus’s attacks on all those who oppose warmongering and genocide in Gaza. Just last week, images of several police officers brutally punching Irish woman Kitty O’Brien, who was demonstrating in Berlin against the genocide of the Palestinians and the murder of journalists in the Gaza Strip, went viral on social media.

The young Irish woman was not only repeatedly punched in the face, but her arm was also broken during her arrest. This brutality sparked worldwide protests against the German police and the federal government. Ireland’s Ambassador to Germany Maeve Collins, as well as senior officials from the Irish Foreign Ministry, felt compelled to contact the German authorities to convey their concern.

Police violence is a direct consequence of the social and political plans of the federal government under Friedrich Merz (Christian Democrats, CDU) and Lars Klingbeil (Social Democrats, SPD). It is investing a trillion euros in armament and war, reintroducing conscription and wants to build Germany into the largest European military power. It is fuelling the war against Russia in Ukraine with arms deliveries worth tens of billions of euros, thereby deliberately risking an attack on Germany by the world’s second-largest nuclear-armed power.

At the same time, it is protecting the profits and assets of the rich and corporations from the consequences of the international customs and trade war with tax cuts and billions in handouts.

This requires massive attacks on the working class—on their jobs, wages, pensions, and social benefits.

Chancellor Merz has already announced his intention to abolish the welfare state as it currently exists.

The war policy and austerity cannot be implemented by democratic means. The federal government is letting the police off the leash because it is deliberately preparing for a confrontation with the working class. To protect its profits and the continued existence of the capitalist system, it will stop at nothing, as its support for the genocide in the Gaza Strip shows.

Merz and the CDU/Christian Social Union (CSU) are also prepared to make deals with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in order to establish authoritarian forms of rule. That is why the government has adopted the AfD’s anti-immigration agenda and has already cooperated with it on several occasions.

Resistance to war and fascism and the fight against social spending cuts are closely linked. As important as protests and demonstrations are, they will not persuade those in power to change course. It is necessary to win the working class, the decisive revolutionary force in capitalist society, to a socialist program that advocates the overthrow of capitalism and the reorganisation of economic production and social life for the benefit of all, not just for the profit of the rich.

This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its youth organisation, International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), stand for. Representatives of the SGP and the IYSSE were in Cologne on Saturday distributing the IYSSE’s statement against conscription. It concludes:

We call on all young people: Organise yourselves in schools, universities and training centres against the reintroduction of conscription! Discuss this appeal with your classmates, fellow students and colleagues! Get in touch with us and become a member of the IYSSE!



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