

Ahead of nationwide youth protests: Government and police prepare repression

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Even before tens of thousands of school students, university students and young workers take to the streets across Germany on Saturday, the government, police and media have launched a campaign of intimidation. The protests against social cuts, dilapidated schools, rising living costs and the reintroduction of conscription are being denounced in advance as potentially violent and extremist.

This campaign is a serious warning. The ruling class is preparing to unleash massive police violence against young people in Germany, as is currently happening in France. There, well over 10,000 demonstrators have already been arrested, and numerous young people have been seriously injured, in some cases literally mutilated, by police weapons.

Behind this aggressive reaction lies the fear that the mass protests in France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Albania and other countries will spread to Germany and merge with the resistance of the working class.

This fear is justified. Anger at the Merz-Klingbeil government is also growing in Germany. While hundreds of billions of euros are being poured into rearmament and war, schools and universities are deteriorating, rents and living costs are rising, and social gains are being destroyed. The reintroduction of conscription is intended to prepare the younger generation to serve as cannon fodder in a direct war against Russia that the NATO powers are provoking.

Tens of thousands of young people have already taken to the streets against conscription in several nationwide school strikes. Most recently, on September 25, 45,000 students in around 100 cities participated, according to the organizers.

Now the movement is expanding. The “genz-regelt” (Gen Z takes care of it) initiative originally planned demonstrations in Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Frankfurt am Main and Munich. Within a few days, independently organized protests were added in 18 other cities. More than 135,000 people have announced their participation on genz-regelt.de. The actual turnout remains to be seen, but the enormous response demonstrates the potential for a mass movement extending far beyond the organizers’ original plans.

Government and police stoke fears of violence

The government’s reaction is revealing. Instead of addressing the demands of young people, it is mobilizing the security apparatus and whipping up hysteria over allegedly impending riots.

Alexander Throm, the domestic policy spokesman for the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) parliamentary group, warned the *Rheinische Post* that the danger must be taken seriously that the protests could be “hijacked by left-wing extremist forces, sections of the migrant milieu and criminals.” He told the *Handelsblatt* that scenes like those in France must be “prevented at all costs,” claiming that a

“sinister alliance” was forming, particularly in Berlin.

Social Democratic Party (SPD) interior policy spokesman Sebastian Fiedler declared that violent protests had no legitimacy whatsoever. He praised the early, “extremely professional” preparations by the security authorities and called for monitoring who was “fuelling” the situation online.

The Berlin Young Union, the youth organization of the CDU, even appealed to the Bundeswehr for “administrative assistance” in a social media post, demanding: “The planned ‘student’ protests must be prevented.”

According to the Federal Interior Ministry, federal and state authorities are in close contact, including through the Joint Counter-Extremism and Counter-Terrorism Centre. The domestic intelligence service is intensifying its monitoring of social media, while security authorities are coordinating with France and Italy. Even turning people back at the borders and deploying the Federal Police to support state police forces are being considered.

Berlin police spokesman Florian Nath declared that the authorities would examine whether these were “legitimate student protests” or whether other forces were exploiting the demonstrations. “We will not allow that,” he threatened. Stephan Weh, the Berlin state chairman of the Police Union (GdP), warned that radical forces must be prevented from exploiting the protests to “act out fantasies of violence” and feed the “narrative of a police force hostile to citizens.”

These statements speak volumes. The focus is not on the democratic rights of young people but on defending the state’s apparatus of violence. The police are claiming the authority to decide for themselves whether protests are legitimate. Media outlets such as *Handelsblatt*, *Welt* and *Spiegel* are spreading warnings of “excesses of violence” and alleged “infiltration.” Yet there is no evidence whatsoever that the protests are geared toward violence. The organizers have explicitly distanced themselves from it.

The lessons of France

The events in France demonstrate what the state apparatus is prepared to do. The movement began in mid-September with school blockades against teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms and dilapidated buildings. The government responded with massive police violence.

By October 13, according to the French Justice Ministry, 7,950 people had been taken into police custody, 85 percent of them minors. Thousands more arrests followed during the protests on October 17 and 24.

The consequences of the weapons used by the police have been devastating. On October 5, a police grenade tore off the left hand of 15-year-old Evan in Lens; he also lost several fingers on his right hand.

Near Saint-Ouen-l'Aumône, a 14-year-old suffered severe facial and jaw injuries from a grenade launcher fired at close range. Several young people lost sight in one eye after being struck by police projectiles. Human rights organizations such as the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and Human Rights Watch condemned the police violence, and numerous investigations were launched against police officers over alleged abuses.

Deaths were also reported in connection with the protests. On October 17, a man died during the protests in Paris, and another died during the night of October 19 in the Châtelet area, where police operations had taken place.

Nevertheless, the movement continues to grow. More than half a million people demonstrated on October 17, and hundreds of thousands again last Saturday, despite bans, curfews and the mobilization of 70,000 security personnel. Workers, teachers and public-sector employees are increasingly joining the protests. The demonstrations are merging with opposition to attacks on wages and pensions, inflation and the Macron government's war spending.

Similar struggles are taking place in Spain against unaffordable rents, in Italy against rising living costs and militarism, and in Portugal, Belgium, Greece, Albania and Serbia. The movement is developing internationally because workers and young people everywhere are being made to pay for the capitalist crisis, rearmament and war. Everywhere, these attacks are meeting growing resistance.

The role of the Left Party

Above all, the ruling class fears that the youth protests will develop into an independent movement of the working class that challenges the capitalist system and the policies of war and social devastation.

The Left Party is also seeking to prevent such a development by directing opposition toward the existing institutions. Its domestic policy spokeswoman, Clara Büniger, criticized the intimidation campaign, calling it an "outrage" that Interior Minister Dobrindt was placing protesting young people under general suspicion and criminalizing them.

At the same time, she declared that the Left Party supported everyone "who demonstrates peacefully" and emphasized: "Concrete dangers must, of course, be taken seriously." Above all, she demanded that the federal government "finally take seriously" the concerns of young people.

This is the essence of the party's policy: It transforms the protests into appeals to the very government against which they are directed, fostering the illusion that it can be pressured into adopting more socially progressive policies. This is a political fraud. The Merz-Klingbeil government knows the needs of young people and is responding, like the Macron government in France, with threats and violence. Like the French "president of the rich," it consciously orients its policies toward the interests of the banks, corporations and financial markets, and toward preparations for war.

The Left Party itself is part of this right-wing offensive. In Berlin, under the leadership of its lead candidate Elif Eralp, it has negotiated an exploratory agreement with the SPD and Greens to form a government under its leadership. The SPD and Greens have already agreed to begin coalition negotiations. On October 31, the day of the nationwide youth protests, a Left Party congress will decide on the matter.

The agreement combines social promises with budget consolidation through 2031, including spending caps. When it comes to expanding the state apparatus, however, no savings are planned; instead, additional spending is envisaged. The Berlin police, who regularly beat demonstrators protesting against the genocide in Gaza, are to be further

strengthened and made more effective through a "modernization and investment plan." At the same time, "combating extremism" is to become a priority for the State Criminal Police Office.

Thus, while young people are protesting against social cuts and the strengthening of the state apparatus, the Left Party is preparing a government that will enforce budgetary discipline and expand the security apparatus.

At the same time, the Left Party's role is to channel resistance into parliamentary manoeuvres and appeals to the very established parties whose policies the protests oppose. In this way, it seeks to prevent young people from organizing independently and uniting their struggle with a socialist movement of the working class.

For an international socialist movement against war and social attacks

The decisive question, therefore, is how the youth protests can be developed into a conscious, independent movement of the working class. The demands for decent schools, affordable housing, secure jobs, higher wages and an end to conscription stand in direct conflict with the interests of the financial oligarchy and the governments' war plans.

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) and its youth organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), are fighting for young people and workers to unite independently of the capitalist parties and trade union bureaucracies.

This requires the building of democratically organized rank-and-file committees of action in schools, universities, workplaces and neighborhoods, united across national borders in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). They must break through the timetables imposed by the trade union bureaucracies and national boundaries, unite the struggles and prepare a Europe-wide general strike against war, dictatorship and social devastation.

The working class possesses the power to do this: Without its labor, production comes to a standstill. This power must be mobilized on the basis of an international socialist program. The billions spent on war and armaments must instead be directed toward education, healthcare, housing and the social needs of the population. This requires the expropriation of the banks, major corporations and the super-rich, and the taking of political power by the working class.

The upcoming youth protests are part of an international movement that has only just begun. Its future depends on whether the growing resistance is united with a socialist perspective and developed worldwide into a conscious struggle of the working class against capitalism.



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