

German Government Shuts Down Indymedia

What It Means and What to Do

CrimethInc.

August 25, 2017

The German government has shut down the German Indymedia site linksunten.indymedia.org, the most widely used German-language platform for radical politics and organizing. They have also conducted raids in Freiburg to seize computers and harass those they accuse of maintaining the site, absurdly justifying this on the grounds that the alleged administrators constitute an illegal organization for the sake of destroying the German Constitution. This represents a massive escalation in state repression against what the authorities call “left-wing extremism,” disingenuously suggesting an equivalence between those who seek to build communities beyond the reach of state violence and Neo-Nazis organizing to carry out attacks and murders like the ones in Charlottesville last week.

Indymedia was founded in Germany in 2001 as de.indymedia.org; a second version appeared in 2008 as linksunten.indymedia.org. The latter was founded to focus on radical politics in southern Germany, but it soon became the most widely used webpage for German-speaking activists. As the original German Indymedia page became technically outdated and swamped by trolling, more and more people switched to linksunten.indymedia.org. In 2013, de.indymedia.org was almost shut down because there weren’t enough people involved.

In the last couple of years, more and more attention has accumulated around linksunten, which offers a space for people to post anonymously. For example, in 2011, a communiqué appeared on the platform claiming responsibility for politically motivated sabotage on the subway infrastructure in Berlin. The site was also used to release information about fascists and Neo-Nazis. In 2016, an article on linksunten presented the complete data of every participant at the convention of the far-right nationalist party Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, or AfD), a total of 3000 names. This further attracted hostile attention from far-right advocates of state repression.

Before the 2017 G20 summit took place in Hamburg, the corporate media was already focusing on linksunten, declaring it to be the coordination page of militant anti-G20 protestors. The AfD started a campaign against the platform, pushing inquiries about Indymedia in Federal parliament and trying to force local governments to ban the platform and other forms of radical infrastructure.

All this built up to the current situation in which the Minister of Internal Affairs Thomas de Maizière banned the site on August 25, immediately before the election. The state raided three

places, including a social center, in Freiburg, making the whole city into a police state for this day. During the raids, they allegedly found some slingshots and sticks, which they are now using as further justification for their propaganda about terrorism.

In fact, Thomas de Maizière is carrying out the agenda of the German far right and fascists, as well as the repressive goals of AfD.

Of course, those who maintain the website have not themselves written anything that could offer legal grounds for this attack. Even corporate media platforms offer space for people to speak anonymously—for example, when members of the State Department speak to the press on the condition of anonymity. The excuse that the state is using to justify this attack is to declare that those who maintain linksunten comprise an official organization aimed at destroying the German Constitution. This is a legal trick. If it succeeds, it could easily be used against other platforms, magazines, and projects, so that everyone spreading radical literature and ideas and documenting activism and social movements will become targets for this kind of repression and state violence. That is the message they want to send, in order to bully the entire population into accepting that the current political order in Germany will persist until the end of time.

This heavy-handed approach shows how afraid the authorities are that radical ideas are spreading and becoming contagious following the successful demonstrations against the G20 summit in July. Thomas de Maizière made it clear enough in his press conference that this assault on Indymedia is a form of revenge for the embarrassment the state suffered during the summit. This also shows how dishonest far-right and statist rhetoric is about free speech—in fact, these hypocrites only use that discourse to position themselves to suppress others' speech. The solution to fascist organizing is not to empower the state to control speech, but to mobilize the general population both against fascists and against the state infrastructure that the far right intends to take over.

In Germany and all around the world, we need radical theory and practice; we need spaces where people can communicate anonymously, so as not to be intimidated by the twin threats of state repression and grassroots fascist violence. In order to understand social movements and struggles, so our sense of history is not swept away in a torrent of ephemera, we need databases that preserve accounts and communiqués. As an author once put it, the struggle of humanity against authoritarian power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. To fight back against this authoritarian crackdown, it is now more important than ever to spread revolutionary material and ideas everywhere and to brainstorm alternative ways to communicate with each other and the general public in times of intensifying state censorship and control. The more that each of us takes on a personal role in this task, the more decentralized and resilient our networks will be.

The attack on Indymedia is part of a much larger offensive against radical infrastructures. In Hamburg, over 30 people have been in prison since the G20 in July—go here to support them. As for Indymedia, you can make donations to the support of the accused here.

Heartening Postscript

When we visited linksunten.indymedia.org later on the day that this article was posted, we found the following message, along with a link to the preceding article and an image referring to the Streisand effect, the process by which efforts to suppress information cause it to spread more widely. The message was comprised of quotations in German from John Perry Barlow's "A

Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace.” This has since disappeared from the site, but it showed that people had been able to regain control of the URL, at least temporarily. These are the selections that appeared:

We’ll be back soon ...

Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather.

We have no elected government, nor are we likely to have one, so I address you with no greater authority than that with which liberty itself always speaks. I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have true reason to fear.

Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. You have neither solicited nor received ours. We did not invite you. You do not know us, nor do you know our world. Cyberspace does not lie within your borders. Do not think that you can build it, as though it were a public construction project. You cannot. It is an act of nature and it grows itself through our collective actions.

[...]

In China, Germany, France, Russia, Singapore, Italy and the United States, you are trying to ward off the virus of liberty by erecting guard posts at the frontiers of Cyberspace. These may keep out the contagion for a small time, but they will not work in a world that will soon be blanketed in bit-bearing media.

[...]

These increasingly hostile and colonial measures place us in the same position as those previous lovers of freedom and self-determination who had to reject the authorities of distant, uninformed powers. We must declare our virtual selves immune to your sovereignty, even as we continue to consent to your rule over our bodies. We will spread ourselves across the Planet so that no one can arrest our thoughts.

While we don’t entirely share the digital utopianism that characterizes the text from which these lines are drawn, they are inspiring in this context, appearing in defiance of a powerful government crackdown. Hope is as hope does. Barlow’s “Declaration” encapsulates the optimism of an earlier era of the internet, an era of greater horizontality and freedom—a spirit that persists despite all the attempts to crush it. As long as people fight for spaces in which we can organize and communicate freely, that goal will remain thinkable, a horizon we may hope to reach yet.

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Retrieved on 23rd April 2021 from crimethinc.com

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