

GLOBAL BUSINESS

# Protests Block Large Part of Central Frankfurt

By RHEA WESSEL MAY 31, 2013

FRANKFURT — Demonstrators blocked a large swath of central Frankfurt on Friday to protest a variety of issues ranging from economic austerity in Europe to capitalism to labor conditions for workers in developing countries.

The demonstrations, which were largely peaceful, started in the morning at the headquarters of the European Central Bank and moved to the central shopping area at midday. Demonstrations were also held in Frankfurt at the headquarters of Deutsche Bank, the biggest German bank and one of the largest in Europe. By midafternoon the protests had moved to the airport.

The police estimated that between 500 and 1,000 people were in scattered groups at multiple sites around the city. Organizers had expected more protesters, and the police had planned for thousands.

A group called Blockupy organized the demonstrations. The group includes members of the Occupy movement, which protested the role of global capitalism by camping out at cities in several countries.

A Blockupy spokeswoman, Frauke Distelrath, told The Associated Press on Thursday that the protest was not aimed at central bank employees but at the bank's role "as an important participant in the policies that are impoverishing people in Europe, in the cutbacks that are costing people their ability to make a living."

The central bank, along with the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund, is part of the so-called troika of international lenders that has authorized bailouts of troubled euro zone countries in exchange for those countries' pledges to cut their budgets and reduce debt.

The E.C.B. reported no disruption to its business Friday and said staff members had been able to get to work.

In the shopping district, groups of mostly young people held up a bloodstained T-shirt and threw baby diapers into a heap of trash to protest working conditions in developing countries.

money in the world is controlled by very few people.”

Earlier in the day, directly in front of the E.C.B. building, organizers instructed protesters by loudspeaker to make sure no bankers could reach their offices. An older man, who was apparently not a banker, was rushed by the crowd when he tried to cross the barricade, a police officer said. The police moved forward to help the man and he was able to pass. A Red Cross worker said 20 people had been injured by pepper spray and force. The police pushed back demonstrators from barricades around the bank and elsewhere.

A woman named Sabrina, who would only give her first name, was physically blocked by protesters as she tried to pass a barricade to reach the law office where she works. Demonstrators shoved her and stepped on her feet as she tried to get by, she said.

“I find this pretty brash,” she said. “I support the right to express your opinion, but the demonstrators shouldn’t be able to rough me up like that.”

One demonstrator named Sven, who said he was an anthropology student in Frankfurt and who also did not want to be identified further, said he had been hit in the face by the police and got pepper spray in his eyes.

“I came because I don’t believe corporations should have the highest position in society and control all the money,” he said. “I think our demonstration is a legitimate protest for democracy and against capitalism, and it should be allowed. The police shouldn’t be here with such a huge presence to try to repress us.”

Jack Ewing contributed reporting from London.