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Thousands protest German coal phaseout

Some 20,000 miners marched through Bergheim demanding protection for their jobs as the coal commission met to draw up a plan to phase out coal-fired power generation. Environmentalists were also there to make a point.



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Under banners: "Without good work, no good climate! We are speaking out for our jobs," as many as 20,000 mine workers took part in demonstrations organized by the IG BCE and Verdi trade unions on Wednesday in Bergheim near Cologne, Germany.



Environmentalists were also present in Bergheim to make their point

IG BCE President Michael Vassiliadis has been a member of the coal commission since the summer. He called for a more respectful approach toward mine workers, akin to the attitude shown [environmentalists campaigning](#) to save the ancient Hambach forest.

"The actions of forest conservationists are given maximum understanding," Vassiliadis told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. "But employees' concerns are often ignored."

"In Germany there are about 100,000 jobs dependent on coal-fired power generation," Vassiliadis said.

About 20,000 people are directly employed in the brown coal industry in Germany, according to Germany's Federal Association for Brown Coal.



The miners marched behind the banner 'We are speaking loudly for our jobs'

Over the coming weeks, the federal government's coal commission is to draw up a plan to phase out coal-fired power stations, which will also take account of the loss of jobs.

A timetable for the phase-out and the implementation of federal assistance estimated at about €1.5 billion (\$1.3 billion) for the affected regions is expected by the end of the year.

Energy giant RWE is still mining lignite or brown coal in three open-pit mines at Hambach, Inden and Garzweiler. It employs about 10,000 people in the mines and nearby power plants.



Facing a coal exit, the employees fear for their jobs and took to the streets in a loud but peaceful protest.

"The most important thing is that we can keep our jobs — this is what we are worried about. Where our energy actually comes from is less important," Fritz Tapfhorn, a member of the trade union IG BCE, told DW.

Even workers from the eastern and central German coal regions traveled to Bergheim to join the protest.

"We are here to support our colleagues and hope for some more years of brown coal," said Diana Mühlberg, who works for the brown coal company LEAG.



The RWE power plant near Bergheim

Environmentalists seeking to protect Hambach forest from destruction to make way for further expansion of the RWE mine were also present in Bergheim on Wednesday. The forest has been the scene of monthslong mass protest, and its clearing was [put on hold following a court ruling](#) against RWE's mine expansion plans.

"We are not protesting against IG BCE; we are here to demand a coal phase-out and climate protection," Olga Perov, a spokesperson for

Campact, a citizen campaign group, told DW.

"We can understand the workers. But the coal exit will come," she said, adding that in the early 1990s, there were 100,000 coal jobs, and today there are only 20,000 left. "We need to have a socially just phase-out," Perov said.

Protests around the brown coal issue in Germany will continue later this week.

Environmental groups including 350.org, the Munich Environmental Institute and Naturfreunde Deutschland have announced a mass demonstration on Saturday close to Hambach forest.

"Hambach Forest Stays!" Germany and the Coal Industry

kw/jm/rt (Reuters, dpa)

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Germany: Thousands hold anti-coal protest in Hambach Forest

A large demonstration against woodland clearance went ahead in Germany's Hambach Forest after a ban was lifted. Organizers say that more is at stake than just conserving a nature area. (06.10.2018)

German court orders suspension of Hambach Forest clearance

A German energy giant's plan to clear ancient woodland, long occupied by environmentalists, so it can mine lignite has been halted temporarily. Meanwhile, a ban on an anti-coal protest near the site has been lifted. (05.10.2018)

Hambach Forest: DW fact check

Does RWE have the legal right to cut down the Hambach Forest? Does Germany really need the coal underneath it? Can the country burn it and still meet its climate targets? DW went in search of the facts. (05.10.2018)

Thousands protest German coal phase-out

Some 20,000 miners marched through Bergheim demanding protection for their jobs as the coal commission met to draw up a plan to phase out coal-fired power generation. Environmentalists were also there to make a point. (24.10.2018)