Neo-Nazis confess to brutal killing of Mozambican in east Germany

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Last week, without any visible agitation or signs of regret, three neo-Nazis confessed to beating to death 39-year-old Mozambican Alberto Adriano in June this year in the eastern German city of Dessau. The Federal Prosecutor's Office has accused the three defendants—aged 16 to 24—of murder.

Federal Prosecutor Joachim Lampe read out the two-page indictment, which dryly describes a crime of almost unparalleled brutality. After a skinhead party, the two 16-year-old accused from nearby Wolfen, Frank M. and Christian R., had missed the last train back and by chance met 24-year old Enrico Hilprecht from Bad Liebenwerda in Brandenburg who had suffered the same fate. Drunk and bawling Nazi slogans, all three staggered through the streets of Dessau.

At 1:45 in the morning at the edge of the city park they encountered Alberto Adriano, who had been visiting friends and was on his way home. He was on his own and the three drunk neo-Nazis shouted abuse at him—“blacks out” and “what do you want here nigger?” According to the indictment, one of the three assailants held Adriano from behind while the other two hit him in the stomach and on the head until he fell to the ground. Then all three kicked him for several minutes.

“Enrico H. alone kicked him about 10 times in the head with his heavy boots,” Federal Prosecutor Lampe said. Afterwards, they pulled off his clothes, throwing his shirt, trousers and underpants into the bushes, took his wallet in which there were 50 marks, tore off his wrist watch and dragged the already unconscious Adriano, by now in only shoes and socks, a few meters further and began kicking him again.

Under police questioning, Frank M. indicated that between kicks Enrico H. had raised Adriano's head several times, bent down and asked what he was doing in Germany, and then pushed his face into the sandy ground. Only when a police patrol which had been called by a witness to the attack drove by did the assailants abandon their victim and attempt to flee in different directions.

When Alberto Adriano was taken to hospital he was still conscious and told the police he had tried in vain to appease his attackers and tell them he had lived in Germany for almost 20 years, that he was married to a German woman and had three small children whom he had to look after. Three days later, Alberto Adriano died as a consequence of his severe head injuries.

Shortly after the indictment was read out, the public was excluded from the court at the request of the defence, since two of the accused were youths and therefore enjoy special protection from “exposure”. The wife of the murder victim, Angelika Adriano, who was admitted as co-plaintiff, and her lawyer Ronald Reimann argued against this request. Reimann stressed that in these proceedings the public would serve almost an educational purpose: “The accused should see that there is no silent majority that sympathises with racist crimes.”

Legally, a public trial would have been possible and is even the norm if one of the accused is over 18 years of age. But the chairman of judges panel, Albrecht Hennig, decided differently and so the many journalists, cameramen and photographers, among them a correspondent from the *New York Times* and a Japanese television team, had to vacate the court.

The public will only get to know what the accused, their lawyers and the 27 witnesses and psychiatric expert called during this trial have to say second-hand and through court press releases. The clear impression arises that the court and the Federal State Prosecutors Office, which took charge of the case soon after the crime was committed, are anxious that the trial could reveal some of the social context and background.

An impartial observer would ask how it is possible that a 16-year-old—who had only just finished school and who apart from a shaved head was hardly distinguishable from

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his contemporaries—could carry out such a brutal racist murder. What sort of conditions did they grow up in? How sick is a society that produces such developments?

The following makes clear how such questions and the social context of the crime are being suppressed. The mayor of Dessau, Social Democrat Hans George Otto, stressed soon after the crime that it was particularly important to make clear that the murderers did not come from Dessau but from neighbouring Wolfen and Brandenburg. Otto found many words of complaint and regret that his city was unjustly reviled as a stronghold for neo-Nazis. He will hear nothing about a considerable potential for right-wing violence in Dessau; his city simply does not deserve such negative headlines.

In contrast, the city council's Commissioner for Foreigners, Radzak Minhel, reports a clear increase in threatening letters against foreigners from right-wing extremists, while the city's multicultural centre must fight for its financial survival.

Minhel said that he was very encouraged by a demonstration of almost 5,000 townspeople a few days after the racist murder, but the old routines and indifference soon returned. Nothing much changed in the city administration. When he wanted to instigate a debate at the first session of the town council following the murder, his request was curtly rejected curtly. A one minute's silence was held, then it was on to the next business as if nothing had happened.

The inability and refusal to talk about the background of the right-wing violence in Dessau, as in other cities, is connected to the fact that the causes and context are almost tangible, but those with political responsibility do not want to admit to them. They consciously close their eyes, because otherwise they would have to admit that their politics have failed completely.

Dessau and nearby Wolfen are situated in the state with the highest level of unemployment in Germany—over 25 percent, not including various work-creation and retraining measures. The overwhelming majority of school leavers do not have the smallest chance of obtaining a reasonable apprenticeship or occupation.

Before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, this region of East Germany formed the largest industrial centre in the country, outside the Ruhr area in the West. In the so-called “chemical-triangle” of Bitterfeld-Halle-Leuna alone, 120,000 were employed in the chemicals industry. The region around Magdeburg was the centre of East German mechanical engineering, employing over 80,000. In Wolfen, the world's first colour film was developed. Today, the whole area is one great industrial desert.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) state government, which for seven years has been supported in office by the ex-Stalinist Party of the Democratic Left (PDS), has not solved a single problem. The effects of social cuts on education and leisure-time facilities take ever more devastating forms. In the northern district of Wolfen, where the two juvenile accused live, official unemployment today amounts to 35 percent.

Already in spring 1998 the accumulated political frustration found its expression in a dramatic gain in votes for the neo-fascist German Peoples Union (DVU). For the first time since the prohibition of Hitler's Nazi party after World War II, a right-wing extremist party advocating openly racist slogans against foreigners gained almost 13 percent of the vote at its first attempt—even winning 17.4 percent in Wolfen.

While social benefits were continually cut, the violence and aggressiveness of the state constantly increased. Minhel told the press that it was not the first time that foreigners had been hunted down and stripped in Dessau's city park. The police had recently carried out very regular searches there for suspected drug offences. “To the applause of the local population they searched Africans and stripped them naked. For many, therefore, all blacks were regarded as criminals.”

Four weeks ago, the Dessau public prosecutor's office acknowledged that three policemen were being investigated for abusing an African. The 18-year-old foreigner reported that during an identity check at the police station he was struck and kicked, according to senior state attorney Susanne Helbig.

These are the conditions under which right-wing extremist youth display not the smallest signs of understanding or regret. Whilst on remand, Frank M. got another prisoner to shave his head and he wore a *Lonsdale* T-shirt, which are popular among skinheads because the logo contains the first four letters of Hitler's Nazi party (NSDAP).

Asked by the judge what the white laces in his boots signified, Enrico H. said calmly: “It shows I am ready to use violence.”

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