Germany: Nearly 100 people killed by right-wing violence over last decade

SPD-Green coalition plays down scale of fascist attacks

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On September 14 the national newspapers, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and the Berlin *Tagesspiegel*, published a list of nearly 100 people who have been victims of extreme right-wing violence over the last ten years since German reunification. (The complete list can be found at www.frankfurter-rundschau.de/fr/spezial/rechts.) The published number is far greater than the figure acknowledged by the Social Democratic-Green coalition government in Berlin or its predecessors.

The list begins with the murder of a Polish immigrant Andrzej Fratczak, who was fatally stabbed after being attacked by three young Germans in front of a discotheque in Lübbenau (Brandenburg) on October 7, 1990. It ends with the case of a homeless person, Norbert Plath, who was beaten to death by four young right-wing extremists in Ahlbeck (Vorpommern) on July 27, 2000.

The following accounts, taken from the newspapers, are representative of the crimes carried out by fascist thugs and how, in a number of cases, authorities did little or nothing to punish the murderers.

"On the night of September 19, 1991, twenty-seven year-old Samuel Kofi Yeboah from Ghana was burnt to death in Saarlouis. Around 3:30 in the morning, unknown persons doused incendiary fluid into a refugee hostel. Two other asylum-seekers from Nigeria were injured. Politicians in Saarland—then ruled by the Social Democratic Party (SPD)—took a considerable time to concede the racist nature of the crime and offer an appropriate reward for information leading to the arrest of the culprits. In the meantime, the official enquiry has been closed. Nine years after the arson attack, the crime remains unsolved.

"On January 31, 1992, a Sri Lankan family of three died in their burning refugee hostel in Lampertheim/Bergstraße. In the autumn of 1992, three youths were arrested and confessed to the arson attack. In 1994, the district court in Darmstadt sentenced them to from four-and-a-half to five-and-a-half years imprisonment for a particularly grievous act of arson. The court failed to recognise any hostility towards foreigners behind the crime.

"During an attack by neo-Nazis on a restaurant in Geierswalde (Saxony) on the night of October 11, 1992, Waltraud Scheffler, a part-time waitress, was so badly injured that she died 13 days later. Scheffler had tried to protest against the skinheads' persistent Nazi chants of 'Sieg Heil'. But one of them struck her, with full force, on the head with a wooden plank. The juvenile court in Bautzen sentenced the skinhead to four-and-a-half years in youth detention.

"On the night of July 26, 1994, Jan W., a Polish building worker, drowned in Berlin's River Spree. After a dispute with a group of young Germans, the 45-year-old man and a 36-year-old fellow countryman were forced to jump into the water and were then violently prevented from swimming back to the bank. Patrolling police heard the cry, 'Piss off, you Poles!' and 'Don't let the Poles out'. The court was unable to find any anti-foreigner motive behind the deed. The cries had merely alluded to the fact of the victims' nationality. In May 1995, four 19- to 25-year-old men and two 16- to 17-year-old girls were sentenced to four years probation and jail on account of bodily injury leading to death.

"On October 23, 1996, the 30-year-old Achmed Bachir was stabbed to death in front of a fruit and vegetable shop in Leipzig. He was trying to help some of his female German fellow workers who were being harassed by two skinheads and baited with cries of 'work-shy Turks'. In November 1997, the district court in Leipzig sentenced Daniel Z. (20) to nine-and-a-half years in youth detention for the crime of murder and severe bodily injury. Norman E., his 19-year-old accomplice, received four-and-a-half-years of youth detention on account of being an accessory to manslaughter."

The journalists who investigated and summarised the cases arrived at a figure of 93 people who had been killed as a result of extreme right-wing violence over the last ten years. This figure is nearly four times the number that the federal government admits. According to the official statistics from the Federal Interior Ministry only 26 deaths from right-wing violence occurred in the last decade.

According to the newspapers the cases all involved clearly proven right-wing motives such as "hatred of 'those who are different', 'foreigners' or 'inferior types'" or were those where such motives were most plausible. In many cases the culprit or culprits could be proven to belong to right-wing circles. Dozens of questionable cases were omitted from the list, leaving open the possibility that the number of victims of right-wing attacks may have been even greater.

The list included victims of arson attacks on the homes of foreigners in Mölln in 1992 and in Solingen—where a family of five lost their lives—in 1993. However, the 1994 arson attack on a house inhabited by foreigners in Stuttgart (where seven people died) and one on the refugee hostel in Lübeck in 1996 (where ten were killed) were not selected, although right-wing extremists were probably involved in both cases. An immigrant living in the Lübeck hostel was eventually acquitted after authorities attempted to railroad him for the murder of ten of his fellow residents. Last spring, the public prosecutor resumed enquiries in connection with the fatal blaze, investigating the activities of four young men known to frequent extremist circles. The four were arrested immediately after the fire, but set free soon afterwards.

According to the newspapers 64 of those killed—32 foreigners and 32 German citizens—were victimised because of their skin colour, political conviction or because they stood up to neo-Nazis. Fifteen of the remaining victims were apparently targeted because they were homeless. The newspapers described the murder of one homeless man and the cover up by authorities that followed.

"On July 16, 1993, an 18-year-old right-wing radical skinhead—previously convicted of a violent offence—assaulted a 33-year-

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old homeless person in Marl with punches and kicks to body and head. While doing this, he cursed him with the words, 'You Jewish pig'. The victim died a few weeks later, without regaining consciousness. The court found that a causal relationship between what happened on the day of the attack and the man's death could not be ascertained. Not his wounds, but a disorder of the victim's brain had led to the internal bleeding that resulted in his death. As a consequence, on March 3, 1994, the district court in Essen gave the culprit a probationary sentence on account of mere 'dangerous bodily harm'."

Since the July 27, bomb attack against immigrants in Düsseldorf leading political figures have said the government would wage a determined effort to combat right-wing extremism and xenophobia. Typical were the August 30 remarks of Wolfgang Clement, Minister president of the state of North-Rhine Westphalia, who said: "We will not rest until we find and bring to justice the culprit or culprits who severely injured ten people—people trying to make a new home in our country—in a cowardly attack in Düsseldorf a few weeks ago." Yet weeks later, the authorities have reportedly not been able to find a trace of those responsible.

The deliberate underestimation of the number of people killed by right-wing violence—which began under the conservative government of Helmut Kohl—has taken on a new character under the present Red-Green coalition government. As the *Tagesspiegel* wrote: "In 1993, during an answer to a parliamentary question from Ulla Jelpke, a representative from the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism, successor to the East German Stalinist party), and other members of the Lower House, the former Kohl government listed a total of 21 right-wing attacks involving the killing of 23 persons from the time of reunification in October 1990 until the end of 1992. In 1999, in the [SPD leader] Schröder government's answer to a question from PDS representatives, the number of crimes for the same period was reduced to eleven crimes leading to the deaths of thirteen victims."

The scandalous manipulation of these figures was the subject of a *Panorama* (ARD television) broadcast on August 24. Based in part on the published list of victims, the report, entitled, "The Secret Dead—Authorities conceal scale of right-wing violence," dealt with the official cover up.

The program noted that among those cases not recorded in the government statistics was the death of Portuguese immigrant Nuno Lourenco, who was brutally assaulted in Leipzig in July 1998. He died in Portugal on December 29, 1998. His attackers were eight young men between 15 and 20 years of age who wanted to "clap foreigners" after Croatia's defeat of the German football team in the World Championship. In September 1999, the district court in Leipzig brought in a judgement of "bodily injury leading to death" and sentenced the main culprit, an apprentice electrician, to four years imprisonment. His accomplices received probationary sentences.

Also neglected was the killing of 28-year-old Algerian asylum-seeker Farid Guendoul (alias Omar Ben Noui), who was hunted down by right-wing extremists in Guben (Brandenburg) on the night of February 13, 1999. Terrified and panicking, he tried to kick in a glass door to escape his pursuers and, in doing so, fatally lacerated himself. Legal procedures against suspects in the case began in June 1999; the main judgement is expected next month. Some of the accused took part in the defacing of a memorial stone set up in memory of Farid Guendoul.

Another missing case was that of 17-year-old Frank Böttcher. On February 8, 1997, he was kicked to the ground by a youth of the same age (wearing paratrooper boots) because he looked like a punk. As he lay prostrate, the thug stabbed him several times with a butterfly knife. Frank Böttcher died in hospital. In June 1997, the Magdeburg district court sentenced the 17 year-old accused—who had already become involved with right-wing skinheads—to seven years in youth detention on account of manslaughter.

The case of the notorious Kay Diesner is also worthy of note. Well known as a hard-core member of Berlin's neo-Nazi milieu for years, Diesner shot and killed police officer Stefan Grage and severely wounded another policeman at the Roseburg expressway rest place in the state of Scheswig Holstein on February 23, 1997. Nevertheless, this incident has not been considered worthy of entry into the statistics. Diesner often referred to himself as a "combatant in the struggle of the white Aryan resistance". Four days earlier in Berlin, he had seriously injured Klaus Baltruschat, a bookseller for the PDS, for being a "political enemy". Although the state Bureau for Criminal Investigation (OCI) in Berlin deemed this attack politically motivated, the OCI in Kiel failed to register the policeman's death with the Federal Office. To justify this remiss, it was claimed that the crime in question concerned a murder "motivated by an attempt to cover up a previous offence".

Confronted with these cases in the *Panorama* broadcast and questioned about the "omission of ten victims" from official Federal Government statistics, Fritz Rudolf Körper, Secretary for State in the Interior Ministry, explained that the figures quoted were "not comparable because selection criteria for the statistics have recently been changed".

Commenting on this in the same television program, Frank Jansen, the reporter who compiled the published lists, said: "And it also often happens that, after the figures have been analysed to provide the overall statistics, some of the cases are struck from the records, simply wiped-out. I know this, for example, from my associations with the Brandenburg police, who told me: The statistics officially available are simply not correct, they are wrong. We're not allowed to do anything about it. We're not allowed to say anything. This is a political order. It is considered unacceptable for the country to be presented as a fascist stronghold."

Only four of the 15 homeless victims chronicled in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *Tagesspiegel* appear in the governing Red-Green coalition's statistics of victims whose deaths resulted from right-wing extremism or hostility towards foreigners.

The reaction of Interior Minister Otto Schily, whose department is responsible for the manipulation of the statistics, was to declare that he would have the relevant statistics reviewed and would argue at the next conference of all the Interior Ministers for the drawing up of common criteria—at state and federal levels—to be used in the detailing of right-wing violence.

Wolfgang Thierse, the SPD president of parliament, recently forwarded an angry letter to Jörg Schönbohm, Interior Minister of Brandenburg and extreme right-wing member of the CDU (Brandenburg is ruled by a coalition of SPD and CDU). The letter had come from a lawyer representing an asylum-seeker who had been harassed by the same fascist thug who killed Farid Guendol in Guben in February 1999. The letter explained that Schönbohm had rejected the immigrant's appeal for asylum on the grounds that the traumatic experience had left the worker only "partially able to support himself".

In his reply—published in the magazine *Der Spiegel* (No. 37/2000)—Thierse acknowledged that "German government institutions were not only ready to tolerate the consequences of right-wing extremism and racism, but were even prepared to use them to justify their official decisions." The result would be that the person concerned "would not be allowed to stay in the country, essentially because of the assault he had been subjected to. So the aim of his right-wing extremist attacker would be accomplished with the approval of government offices—a scandalous situation".

In an interview by the *Frankfurter Rundschau* given a day after publication of the list of victims, Thierse acknowledged that the Federal government had distorted the scope of racist violence, but expressed confidence that Schily and the Interior Ministry would formulate more reasonable criteria to record right-wing attacks.

Such parliamentary and media manoeuvres are aimed at concealing the

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criminal role played by the SPD and its supporters, not only in tolerating right-wing violence, but, in the final analysis, encouraging it. Since coming to power the SPD-Green government has slashed social programs, reduced taxes on the wealthy and increased the economic pressure on the working class. At the same time, the SPD and the Greens have joined the right-wing in blaming immigrants for the threat to German jobs and living standards and have enacted severe restrictions on the right of foreigners to asylum.

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