

Heavy sentences for racist murderers in Germany

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Two and a half months after the murder of Mozambican Alberto Adriano in the east German industrial town of Dessau, three neo-fascists have been awarded heavy prison sentences. The regional high court of Nauenburg sentenced 24-year-old Enrico Hilprecht to a life sentence and the two 16-year-olds who also participated in the killing each received nine-year sentences in a youth prison.

The court concluded in its verdict that all three young men had acted out of “hatred of foreigners” and had demonstrated “reckless disregard” for their victim. The accused acknowledged the sentences without any show of emotion. During the trial none of the accused showed any remorse for their actions.

In hearings that were closed to the public, the court heard the testimony of 27 witnesses and a number of experts. It was established that the three neo-fascists attacked Adriano, a resident of Germany for the past 20 years, in Dessau's main park on June 11. For several minutes they beat and kicked him in the head, then stripped him of his clothes and robbed him.

The sentences differ dramatically from earlier sentences in trials of neo-fascists. In September 1992 the local court in Frankfurt-Oder awarded sentences ranging between two years on probation and four years imprisonment for five men between the ages of 19 and 21 who, in the autumn of 1990, beat an Angolan, Antonio Amadeu Kiowa, to death in Eberswalde. At the time the wording of the court's verdict stated that sentences could not serve as a means of deterrence or general prevention. Two years later the regional court in Frankfurt-Oder threw out the prosecution of two policemen who were accused of standing by and doing nothing as the Angolan man was beaten to death.

In the trial concerning the devastating fire which gutted a house for asylum-seekers in Lübeck in 1996,

one of the occupants of the building, Safwan Eid, himself a survivor of the fire, was accused of arson. Eid was later acquitted, but the prosecuting state attorney consistently refused to pursue evidence pointing to the involvement of a group of neo-fascists known to have been in the vicinity of the blaze. Ten asylum-seekers lost their lives in the Lübeck fire.

In the case of Alberto Adriano, presiding judge Albrecht Hennig adopted an unusual tone in delivering his 45-minute verdict. “Senselessly, without reason and pitilessly”, a fellow human was beaten to death. The somewhat slightly built skinheads even had to exert themselves in order to inflict the injuries. “Animals treat an enemy on the ground with mercy, neo-fascists apparently not,” Hennig commented.

During the proceedings it was not possible to establish the individual actions of the accused, as they remained largely silent. According to Judge Hennig the long sentences for the two youth offenders was to have an “educational purpose”.

The judge then went into the social background to the killing. East Germany in particular was marked by a shocking climate of racism, he said, and Adriano was killed only because of the colour of his skin. Hennig referred to the high number of acts of violence against foreigners in the east German state of Sachsen-Anhalt, although foreigners constitute just 1.6 percent of the state's total population.

In the decade since German reunification 28 people had died as a result of neo-fascist violence, three this year alone. The numbers of potentially violent neo-fascists are growing continually and are currently estimated at 9,000 throughout Germany. According to the judge, “Half of them live in the states of the former east Germany”, although only 21 percent of Germany's population lives in the eastern part of the country.

The killing should be seen against the background of the difficult economic situation in the east German states, which provides the breeding ground for right-wing violence. In order to illuminate the ideological climate to which such youth were exposed, the judge recited passages from extreme anti-Semitic and xenophobic texts from skinhead bands that have been banned but are still, nevertheless, very popular amongst certain dubious circles: “Our faces are full of hatred, violence for us is a pleasure...”. A so-called “Africa song” begins with the words, “Africa for apes. Europe for whites. Stick the apes in a toilet and flush them away like s__t.”

Criminal law is not an “effective means against human idiocy and racism”, the judge concluded in his verdict. Especially when in addition to criminal acts there are “other indices” in society that are a “cause for concern”.

The way in which the judge referred to the political background of the crime contrasts sharply with the complacent phrases with which German politicians have commented on the judgement. This applies above all to Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who has just concluded a 10-day tour of the east German states. In the town of Wittenberge, Schröder said the judgement was an “appropriate punishment for an appalling crime”. It shows “that the state, police and legal system, independently from one another, are establishing new limits which nobody should contravene,” he said.

The minister president for the state of Sachsen-Anhalt, Reinhardt Höppner (Social Democratic Party—SPD), described the judgement as “a clear signal to all neo-fascist perpetrators of violence”. At the same time he emphasised that “right-wing extremist and xenophobic attitudes cannot be countered merely with legal judgements and the consequent activity of the state,” appealing to the population to take responsibility.

The legal speaker for the Green fraction in the Bundestag was quoted stating, “The state reacted in an appropriate and consequent fashion” and that it was to be hoped that the judgement in this case would serve to deter other potential violent criminals.

A day after the judgement and before a large media presence Chancellor Schröder laid a wreath at the monument for Alberto Adriano in Dessau's main park

and repeated his phrase “an appropriate punishment for an appalling crime”. There was not a single indication of self-criticism, not a word to explain how things could get to a stage where young persons aged 16 know just hatred and misanthropy.

Chancellor Schröder and the entire ruling caste of politicians are trying to give the impression that mass unemployment, the destruction of social benefits and educational possibilities with the resulting lack of perspective are just part of the natural state of things and not the result of their own daily decisions. The intensifying social crisis means that the general political and ideological climate in society is being increasingly poisoned.

Two of the murderers in Dessau began their schooling 10 years ago at the time of German reunification. At this crucial period of their lives they were surrounded by people who, in very many cases, undertook a complete about-turn with regard to their social and political views. Fundamental social principles and norms appeared to be meaningless. Since then they have grown up in a society in which any form of solidarity with the poor and the weak has been terminated. Compassion and sympathy for one's fellow man is regarded today as a sign of weakness. What counts is ruthlessness, lack of scruples and harshness.

How is one to judge a society that no longer has anything to offer its young generation and seeks to protect itself from their waywardness and aggression by the highest possible jail sentences? Whoever genuinely searches for the causes of the tragedy in Dessau cannot avoid taking a long hard look at the state of a society that increasingly demonstrates signs of profound sickness.



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