

Brandenburg intelligence service slanders the WSWS: What really took place in Frankfurt-Oder?

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Six weeks ago the Brandenburg intelligence service (*Verfassungsschutz*) seized on an attack on the immigration office in the town of Frankfurt-Oder to accuse the *World Socialist Web Site* of promoting violence and being a part of a milieu of violent “left extremism.” Since the attack, little light has been shed on the actual events on the night in question.

In the early hours of September 16, unknown culprits shattered the windows of the immigration office in Frankfurt-Oder, tossed a foul smelling liquid into rooms, filled the locks of the external doors with glue, and sprayed slogans on the gable of the building. Apparently, the culprit, or culprits, left behind an article published by the WSWS that deals critically with the refugee policy of the German government.

Shortly afterwards a report appeared on the online publication of the Brandenburg intelligence service claiming that the WSWS article published in February, 2001 was proof of the “left extremist background” of the attack. The intelligence service said that “the article ranked alongside a number of similar publications which, taken together, promote or produce a propensity for violence.” The report concluded with the words: “The road to criminal acts is paved with such texts.”

The editorial board of the WSWS has already firmly rejected this slanderous insinuation. (See “Brandenburg Intelligence service slanders the World Socialist Web Site”)

Since then, it has become clear that the investigations by the police and state attorney’s office are proceeding at a remarkably sluggish pace. When questioned, the state attorney’s office in Frankfurt-Oder informed the WSWS that the responsible state attorney, Ulrich Scherding, was on holiday and the case was still in the hands of the police. But the press representative at police headquarters, Peter Salender, said it was the state attorney who was responsible for providing information to the press on pending investigations.

After the WSWS editorial board submitted a number of written questions, members of the board were invited to attend a briefing at police headquarters in Frankfurt-Oder. As it transpired, however, very little was obtained in terms of new information.

The first set of questions submitted by the WSWS was: “Who notified the police of the attack and at what time? Which police station carried out the initial investigation at the scene of the crime? Were there any witnesses from the neighbourhood or anybody passing by who witnessed what took place?” The police refused, for “investigative reasons,” to answer any of these questions.

The second series of questions was: “What as of today has been firmly established about the course of events? Was more than one

person involved in the attack? Are investigations being carried out into potential suspects? Have charges been made against suspects, or any other unknown persons?” Again, no answer was provided.

The third set of questions was: “Who found the WSWS article? Where and when exactly was the article found? Has the article been checked for fingerprints and evidence concerning the manner in which it was printed? Are there any hand-written or other types of comments, or any other identifying marks on the article?” Again, no answer was given, apart from an assurance that the investigation was being professionally carried out, utilizing all available investigative and technical methods.

The police spokesman, Peter Salender, insisted that the police had no doubt regarding the source of the article. The culprits left it at the scene of the crime, he said, in order to make clear the political motivations for their actions. When asked to justify this claim, and clarify who found the article and when, Salender once again refused to give a response.

An investigation carried out by the WSWS itself in Frankfurt-Oder has provided a more detailed picture of what actually took place. Our investigation has also confirmed the impression that the authorities have shown little real interest in clarifying what happened.

Frankfurt-Oder is situated on the German border with Poland and lies approximately 100 kilometres east of Berlin. With some 70,000 inhabitants, its population is in decline. Growing social and political tensions in many parts of the former industrial town are very evident. Many of those of working age have sought to move to other parts of Germany. Unemployment in the town is rising steadily. At the end of 2001, the official unemployment rate stood at 18.1 percent. At the beginning of this year, the figure had risen to 22 percent.

Politically, the town is dominated by the SPD (Social Democratic Party). In state elections four years ago, 65 percent of the electorate of the constituency of Frankfurt-Oder voted either for the SPD or the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism). The opposition conservative CDU (Christian Democratic Union) won just 25.3 percent of the vote. Some 5.3 percent went to two extreme right-wing parties—the DVU (German Peoples Union) and NPD (German National Party).

Since then, however, there has been a dramatic growth of opposition to the policies of the SPD. In local elections held last Sunday (October 26), the SPD suffered a devastating defeat and slumped to just 15 percent of the vote in Frankfurt-Oder. Compared with the local elections five years ago, voter participation plummeted from 74.8 to 38.3 percent. The SPD received only 9,000 votes, compared to its total of 39,000 votes in 1998. The PDS increased its vote by nearly five

percent in proportional terms, but in absolute terms it actually obtained 16,000 fewer votes.

The immigration office that was attacked in the early morning hours of September 16 is situated in a relatively quiet part of the city centre. Apartment blocks are located just a few steps away. A number of local residents were startled by the attack, which shattered twelve windows of the immigration building.

One elderly resident residing on Bischoff street, whose flat affords a good view of the immigration office, told the WSWs that he was awake at the time of the attack and heard a loud noise and the breaking of glass at around 3:50 AM. He was unable to identify anybody, but clearly heard several persons—"at least two"—running down the street. A neighbour contacted the police, who arrived a few minutes later.

This resident was of the opinion that neither the police nor the political authorities were really interested in clarifying the circumstances of the assault on the immigration office. He also reported that, following an initial burst of reports in the local newspapers and even on local television, no further information had appeared about the incident. He himself had not been questioned by the police about the events of that night.

Similar comments were made by a female resident. She had not been questioned by the police or any other investigating authority, although she had information to give. In the early morning hours of the 16th, she was awakened by the shattering of windows and from her balcony saw a police car pull up a few minutes later. She reported that the police seemed largely uninterested in what had taken place. She was surprised that the police made no effort to search for suspects, although the attack had taken place just a few minutes previously.

Instead, having made a short tour around the building, the police reported the incident by radio to their headquarters in a "very noisy manner which could be heard by everybody," according to the resident. In the radio report the police mentioned the twelve broken windows and the fact that the facade had been sprayed with the slogan: "Germany is once again carrying out deportations. Resistance is necessary and possible!" In addition, the police emphasised that they had found a three-page text indicating responsibility. A short time later the initial police patrol was replaced by a second, which sealed off the area.

As the police were communicating with their headquarters, the same resident, who does not wish to be named, reported that she saw a man standing in the entrance to a gymnasium, between 100 and 150 metres from the scene of the crime. He seemed to be following what was going on. The resident noticed that the man was carrying a bag in his hand and wore light-coloured trousers.

A short time later another person, "also in light-coloured trousers," appeared at the scene of the attack but, according to the witness, the police showed no interest in checking his identity or interrogating him. "I was very surprised, bearing in mind that it was early in the morning and the police had just sealed off the area. It would have seemed obvious to question the man, or at least establish whether he had seen anything."

She also reported another anomaly. She has lived on the street for a total of five years, and during this period the alarm at the immigration building had gone off at least three or four times. To her knowledge, on every occasion it had proven to be a false alarm. On this particular day, however, no alarm went off. "Is that not strange?" she remarked. "If you ask me, the alarm had been turned off for some reason."

The building housing the immigration office is a concrete construction typical of the former East Germany. The ground floor is occupied by the town's official registration office. The suite of rooms taken up by the immigration office is situated on the first floor. The head of the immigration office, Herr Terlach, explained to the WSWs that the building did not have its own janitor. It is subject to routine checks by a town-run security service, and also lies on the route of regular police patrols. The head of the office could not say how often the building was checked by police patrols.

Herr Terlach explained that he lived outside of the town and was first informed of the attack at 4:30 AM. One hour later he was at the scene of the assault and the area around the building had already been cordoned off. The police did not want to break down the doors to the office, preferring to wait for him. It was then established, however, that the doors had been filled with glue and could only be opened by an emergency locksmith. Nobody had entered the rooms of the building. There was no damage to files or computers and nothing had been removed. However, a foul-smelling liquid had been tossed through the broken windows, ruining the carpets in a number of offices.

When asked about a letter claiming responsibility, Herr Terlach replied that he had been informed that a text had been found. Although, as head of the immigration office, he bore joint responsibility for immigration policy in the town, he had not personally seen the text. Later he learned that the text was old and of a more general nature. It was not directed specifically against his office and had not been drafted by those responsible for the attack. He also acknowledged that he had no information about the progress of the investigation.

Six weeks after the attack, unanswered questions have proliferated. Why is the police investigation being pursued in such a slovenly and indifferent manner? Why has there been no questioning of potential witnesses? Why is it not possible to make known results of the investigation that have no immediate security implications for the case?

Six weeks after the attack, the investigating authorities have not provided any information other than what was published in the media on the following day.

The speedy reaction of the intelligence service stands in stark contrast to the passivity of the police authorities. The intelligence service immediately used the attack on the immigration office to infer a connection between a socialist publication and the milieu of "left extremism" and violence. This is despite the fact that, up until now, the investigating authorities have been unable—or unwilling—to release any information about the culprits or the background to the attack. The article making accusations against the WSWs is dated September 16, i.e., the same day as the attack on the immigration office.

In light of these facts, the question we posed in our original statement remains to be answered: Were agents of the intelligence service involved in the attack on the Frankfurt immigration office on September 16? Does the intelligence service know more than it is revealing? Did it play a part in placing the WSWs article at the scene?



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