

Recent bomb attack in Cologne's Turkish district—"no political background?"

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On Monday, June 9, a bomb detonated in front of a hairdressing salon and general store in the German city of Cologne, injuring 22 people, 4 of them seriously. All but one of the victims were either Turkish or of Turkish origin. The day after the attack, before all the evidence had been gathered, federal Interior Minister Otto Schily (Social Democratic Party, SPD) declared that there was no proof of a terrorist or racist motivation behind the bombing.

Orhan Hargin, who visited the hairdresser just before the bomb went off, described the effect of the blast: "A man lay on the ground. He had nails all over his arm—it was horrible." Kucuc Ziya commented: "I saw people lying on the sidewalk. One man's arm was completely dislocated and he had a 10-centimetre gaping wound."

The bomb was equipped with 10-centimetre-long nails, whose thickness was roughly the size of a child's finger. They were found up to 100 meters away from the where the blast occurred. According to authorities, the nails were placed all around the explosive, which was encased in a metal container. The *Berliner Tagesspiegel* newspaper reported that, based on unofficial police information, "the bomb was reconstructed out of a gas container." Apparently, the bomb was attached to a bicycle and remotely detonated.

The police are now looking for the man who placed the bicycle in front of the hairdressing salon. They described him as "around 180-cm tall, approximately 30 years, wearing a dark baseball cap, under which blonde hair was visible. The man carried a backpack."

According to accounts by residents given to the WSW, the man had attempted to place the bicycle in front of a Turkish restaurant, in the middle of Keupstrasse. He was then asked, however, to find another place for it. Many more would have been injured or even killed if the bomb had been detonated in the front of this busy restaurant.

Keupstrasse, in the Cologne municipality of Mülheim, is well known throughout the city as a centre for Turkish businesses. It is home to scores of Turkish restaurants, tearooms, jewellery stores, travel agents, hairdressers, groceries and wedding shops. A few years ago, the city

mayor expressly acknowledged the level of integration of Turkish business people there into the wider community. The street is a centre of attraction for Turkish residents throughout the whole district, and it is clear that such a terror attack would include visitors and residents of the area as victims.

Mülheim is located in the north of the city, on the east side of the Rhine River. It contains nine suburbs with a combined population of 144,000. In the immediate vicinity of Keupstrasse lies a huge space of vacant buildings that belonged to the now-defunct company and cable manufacturer Felten and Guilleaume, which had a long history in the area.

In light of the type of bomb and the chosen location, the comments by some residents were very clear, such as that of a fruit grocer Hüsseyin: "It was the Nazis, who else?" The assertion made by Schily and the interior minister for the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Fritz Behrens (SPD), that the bombing was purely a criminal affair, is being rejected by locals.

Stefan, 17, who helped the owner of the hairdresser salon with the cleanup of his devastated business, did not know of any "criminal gangs," referred to by politicians and the media alike. "I've lived in this area for 17 years. There are no gangs here. The bomb was intended to injure a lot of people who live and shop here. The attack was not directed against businesses."

Servet, who works in the teahouse across the road from where the bomb went off, also commented: "If it were directed against the shop or the owner, then the bomb would have been thrown into the shop. Or he would have done something else against the owner. It's just so clear—the bomb was intended to injure and kill people here." He was also of the opinion that the most plausible explanation was that the assailant came from German right-wing and fascist circles.

"In the past, Keupstrasse has repeatedly been the scene of xenophobic attacks against Turkish people, businesses and homes," reported Henning Troschel for the television news

broadcaster N-TV. “In almost all cases, the assailants still remain unknown, and more than once they carried with them the old war flag of the German Reich during their attacks.”

At this point, the background and objective of the bombing remain unclear. Many facts, however, point in the direction of a racist motive. Federal and state interior ministers Schily and Behrens, however, advised that enquiries in this direction were to be prevented.

Why? Why do both of these social democratic ministers assume there is no indication that the attack was politically and racially motivated? “The findings that our security departments have so far ascertained do not point to a terrorist background, but rather to a criminal milieu,” said Schily three days after the attack, even as these same departments were stating that they had yet to determine the motive. Similar remarks were also made by Fritz Behrens.

There is only one plausible reason for these unrealistic comments: to admit to an attack by right-wingers does not suit the political aims of the government.

For weeks now, the media, with the active support of Schily and other government politicians, have campaigned against supposed Islamic “preachers of hate.” The Islamic preacher Metin Kaplan, who stands in the centre of this barrage, lives in the Cologne district of Chorweiler, only a few kilometres away from where the bomb attack occurred. The campaign scapegoats Muslim immigrants and refugees in order to justify and prosecute a massive tightening of immigration laws. These planned laws, which supposedly were originally intended to boost immigration and make it easier, have since mutated into deportation laws that will function as a mechanism for the dismantling of elementary rights, such as protection against arbitrary treatment at the hands of government departments.

If the attack in Cologne should prove to be the work of right-wing extremists, it would undermine this campaign. It would be made clear that a terrorist threat comes from a completely different source than the authorities would like us to believe. The Muslim population, currently under general suspicion, would suddenly appear as the victims. This is why the government has little interest in an investigation along these lines.

In addition, there is also the fact that its very own policies are encouraging racist attacks. Back in 1992, a campaign against the rights of asylum seekers had incited right-wing extremists to set fire to the homes of immigrants and refugees. In Mölln and Solingen, many people were killed as a result. In view of the current campaign against Muslims, it would hardly be farfetched if right-wing and extremist groups once again took the “deportation problem” into their own hands.

The attempt to deny any kind of political background to

the Cologne attack has not, in fact, been entirely successful. On June 12, the *Kölner Stadtanzeiger* newspaper published a lead article with the headline “Public prosecutor: a political motive is also a possibility.”

The article quoted Rainer Wolf, the prosecutor heading the case: “The bomb was self-constructed by a hobbyist with a great deal of skill.” According to his assessment, “the bomb does not look to have been concretely directed at one person, but was rather aimed indiscriminately at people. Whoever wants to deliver a warning would proceed in a different manner.” Unable then to rule out a political motive, he made the next effort to play down what happened: “Possibly it was a crazy individual with completely outlandish ideas who let off the bomb.”

The attempt at a one-sided approach to the investigation, rejecting and concealing any indications of a right-wing political motive behind the attack, is as old as this type of attack itself. One automatically recalls the post-September 11 anthrax attacks in the US, which were directed at high-ranking Democratic Party politicians. In the beginning, the US government had created an atmosphere of hysteria in order to ram through measures to dismantle democratic rights. However, as it became clear that the only suspects were right-wing laboratory workers within the military, this campaign abruptly ended. To date, no one has been convicted, even though around 15 people are suspected.

The type of attack in Cologne also recalls the killings more than 20 years ago at the Munich Oktoberfest. On September 26, 1980, a similar bomb exploded, killing 13 and injuring more than 200. The assailant, 21-year-old geology student Gundolf Köhler, was also killed in the blast. At the time, attempts were also made to portray the atrocity as the work of a lone culprit. It was only five years later when Ulrich Chaussy’s book *Oktoberfest—A Killing* disproved this theory and exposed the cover-up of the fascist forces behind the bombing.

Whether or not the attack was the work of one person or of a fascist group, the notion of a right-wing provocation is not as “outlandish” as the *Kölner Stadtanzeiger* indicates. It serves rather as a reflection of the policies being carried by all of the main political parties in Germany against foreigners.



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