

Germany: Open questions in the stabbing of police chief in Bavaria

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On December 13, Alois Mannichl, the director of police in the Bavarian town of Passau, was stabbed on the doorstep of his home by an unknown assailant. Mannichl was badly injured in the attack but has since recovered sufficiently to return to work.

Mannichl has been able to describe both his assailant and the course of events. The man who rang the police chief's doorbell was between 25 and 35 years old, had a bald head and a distinctive tattoo. He verbally abused the 52-year-old police director with the words: "Best wishes from the national resistance" and "Left-wing pig, you will no longer trample on the graves of our comrades." He then stabbed Mannichl. According to the testimonies of witnesses, the perpetrator also had accomplices apparently waiting in a car nearby.

In the months prior to the attack, a number of extreme right-wing Internet sites had conducted a systematic campaign against Mannichl. Due to his activities against neo-Nazis, the Passau police chief had become an object of hatred among such circles.

On Mannichl's instructions, the local police had undertaken measures to prevent neo-fascists from conducting demonstrations and had also removed a Reichswehr flag, of the type used by the Nazis in the Second World War, from the grave of a leading Nazi, Friedhelm Busse. The flag had been draped on Busse's grave by Thomas Wulff, the notorious NPD (German National Party) activist.

In August 2008, Mannichl led police in the evacuation of a camp organised by the group "Blood Brothers of Lower Bavaria." In the same year he personally supervised a demonstration held by the NPD in Passau, at which he prevented NPD members from laying a wreath at the local military cemetery. Mannichl is also active in the local council, where he has sought to take measures against a club routinely used by neo-Nazis.

Consequently, the broadly accepted assumption was that right-wing extremists were behind this latest attack. One day after the incident, based on the statements of those involved in the attack, the police published a statement declaring that the perpetrator(s) were "from the extreme-right spectrum operating on the basis of political motives."

The case excited interest across the country. There have been a succession of cowardly attacks by groups of neo-Nazis on foreigners, asylum-seekers and other minorities in Germany but the attempted assassination of a leading state representative would represent a dramatic escalation. Numerous media sources spoke of a "new dimension of brown (Nazi) violence."

A 50-man special commission was immediately set up to clarify issues surrounding the incident. Since that time the police have received around 250 tips from the population at large. Two suspects from Munich—Manuel H. (33) and Sabine H. (22)—were temporarily held in custody. They both belong to the group "Free Nationalists in Munich," which had links to the planned bombing of a Munich synagogue in 2003. The pair had been seen in the proximity of the attack on Mannichl. Two other suspects from the Passau region were also arrested, but all four were set free a short time later due to a lack of evidence.

Just two weeks later the special commission was disbanded, although there was still no real indication of who was responsible. The attack is now being treated as a routine criminal case to be dealt with by the Bavarian state police.

This train of events raises many questions:

A skinhead thug with a distinctive tattoo strikes down a leading police officer. Numerous tips are then given by the population to a special police commission providing a clear picture of the perpetrator. At the same time, it is well known that the German police carefully monitor the activity of all neo-Nazi groups in the area. The police

authorities in Germany and in neighbouring Austria declare they have conducted extensive checks on all known right-wing extremists.

Since the last failure to ban Germany's largest neo-fascist organisation, the NPD, it is well established that the German police and intelligence services have a significant number of agents in right-wing extremist groups and are extremely well informed of their activities.

Nevertheless, the perpetrator and his accomplices remain at large and, after a two-week investigation, the police reveal they have nothing to go on.

Is it the case that the perpetrator is unknown to the authorities, or rather could it be that they are seeking to conceal his identity? What does the German intelligence service (BND—Office for the Protection of the Constitution) know about the assassination attempt on Mannichl? Was the perpetrator an undercover agent?

Within conservative political circles, there are those who counsel that one should not harass right-wing extremists because of the attack. Former East German civil rights activist, Vera Lengsfeld, told one right-wing media source that in the Mannichl case “it has only been assumed there is a right-wing extremist background” to the incident. She accuses the press and political circles of “hysterically rushing to conclusions” and then plays down the role of extreme right-wing groups, comparing them to the “1968 rowdies” and “anarchist leftists.”

In fact, there have been a number of incidents in recent years involving secret service agents who not only supervise extreme-right parties, but also function as agents provocateurs inside them.

An attempt by the German state to ban the NPD in 2003 failed—when it became clear in the course of the legal proceedings—that the German intelligence services had heavily infiltrated the leadership of the organisation. Lawyers for the NPD argued that the case against the party was prejudiced because of the large number of state agents giving evidence as members or leaders of the NPD.

Only recently, Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Hermann advised against any new attempt to ban the NPD on the basis of the large number of undercover agents still inside the organisation.

There is a long list of criminal offences either directly carried out by state undercover agents, or involving them.

A firebomb attack on a house in Solingen in 1993 resulted in the deaths of five Turkish citizens. Three of the perpetrators were later identified as members of a school

for self-defence run by a BND agent, Bernd Schmitt.

Two years later, a skinhead tried to drown a Nigerian citizen in a lake near Berlin. It later emerged that the skinhead had worked for a period of time for the Brandenburg branch of the BND.

In 1997, the BND branch in the state of Mecklenburg hired the services of an NPD member, Michael Grube, for a monthly wage of between 500 to 700 marks. Under the direction of his two secret service heads, “Klaus” and “Jürgen,” Grube took over a leading position in his local NPD group, which expanded from 12 to 50 members. At the beginning of 1999, Grube left the NPD and with other militant neo-Nazis created the so-called Socialist People's Party (SVP). Together with other members of this organization, he then organised and took part in an arson attack in March 1999 on a pizzeria run by foreign workers.

It is well known that the extreme-right is highly active in Bavaria. The NDP has around 1,000 members and the state is regarded as a stronghold of the organization. This figure is only exceeded by the membership of the NPD in the East German state of Saxony. In both states, the NPD encourages collaboration with other rightist and neo-fascist groups.

At the same time, the NPD was particularly active in Passau during the last Bavarian state elections. The organisation set up information stands and meetings. It regularly holds local political discussions (Stammtische) for “regulars” and “discussion circles for interested citizens.”



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