

Who is behind the arson attacks in Berlin?

Ulrich Rippert
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Ulrich Rippert is a candidate of the German Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, PSG) in the Berlin state election.

Incendiary attacks on cars in Berlin have significantly increased in recent days. According to media reports, as many as 67 vehicles have been wholly or partly burnt out since last Tuesday night alone.

In contrast to earlier isolated incidents of car torchings, luxury cars and expensive limousines are no longer being specifically targeted, “but also, cars of less expensive price ranges”, said the Berlin police spokesman, Thomas Neuendorf. “We believe there is only one perpetrator, or just a few,” said Neuendorf in a television interview. The offenders use commercially available charcoal lighter fluid, which is doused on the tires and set alight.

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and some right-wing parties are exploiting the arson attacks in the Berlin city-state elections to call for aggressive law-and-order policies. They accuse the governing Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Left Party Senate of grossly neglecting “the security of the citizens of Berlin”. In addition, they claim the Berlin police have underestimated and wantonly disregarded the danger posed by “violent left-wing extremists” during the SPD-Left Party’s 10-year-long city administration.

“How long will Wowereit (SPD city mayor) and Körtig (SPD Senator for the Interior and Sport) go on tolerating this moral decline”, asks Frank Henkel, the CDU’s top candidate. “Vandalism has reached an intolerable level” and the car burnings have “become a veritable conflagration”, he said. Similar sentiments were expressed by the FDP’s leading candidate, Christopher Meyer. He complained that all factions in the lower house of the Senate were united against the radical right, but “the SPD-Left Party coalition and sections of the Greens” failed to consistently maintain

this attitude, when it came to fighting left-wing extremism.

The CDU has already announced a new poster campaign for next week, in which they intend raising the issue of the public security in the city centre. The speed with which the CDU has organised its poster campaign raises the query of whether the party leadership had had prior knowledge of the arson outbreak.

Burkhard Dregger, the CDU candidate for Berlin-Reinickendorf, is calling for the reinstatement of the Volunteer Police Reserve (FPR), which existed in West Berlin during the years of the Wall from 1961 to 1989 and was extended until 2002. The FPR was West Berlin’s response to the Stalinist state’s factory combat groups operating in the eastern part of city. The FPR was never more than a hastily and inadequately trained auxiliary police force, primarily used to protect property and disbanded after a series of scandals in 2002.

Burkhard Dregger, who studied law in the US, is the son of the right-wing CDU populist Alfred Dregger. While his voluntary policing scheme is opposed by some sections of the CDU, it is supported by several right-wing parties that are calling for the creation of vigilante groups.

Another CDU right-winger is Rainer Wendt, chairman of the German Police Trade Union. He has appealed to the population to help in the manhunt for the perpetrators. “The police won’t be able to do it alone”, Wendt told Dortmund’s *Ruhr Nachrichten* newspaper. He said the police force in Berlin “is in a weak condition”. *Spiegel Online* reports that Wendt demanded better equipment for the police, including more helicopters and drone aircraft with thermal imaging cameras.

Wolfgang Bosbach (CDU), chairman of the interior committee of the Bundestag (federal parliament),

reacted in a similar manner. He told the N24 television station: “The RAF (German radical bourgeois Red Army Faction terrorists of the 1970s and 1980s) also began with arson”. Dieter Wiefelsputz, the SPD’s domestic policy spokesman in the Bundestag, also described the attacks on cars as a “precursor to terrorism”. He told the *Bild* tabloid that the “Red Army Faction” had started with arson attacks: “If such offenders think they won’t get caught, or if so, then they’ll only be lightly punished, they’ll be encouraged to commit even worse crimes”.

This is not the first time arson attacks on vehicles have been used to promote a law-and-order campaign in the run-up to city-state elections in Berlin. It was much the same five years ago. Then, however, the attacks were directed primarily against vehicles and equipment of the police and army.

To recall, a brief chronology of the events in 2006:

April 9: arson attack on police headquarters in Berlin

May 5: arson attack on two official vehicles of the Berlin police in Berlin-Lichtenrade

May 24: arson attack on the Social Security Court in Berlin-Mitte

July 20: arson attack on a car dealership in Berlin-Mitte

September 4: arson attack on two official vehicles of the federal police in Berlin-Lichtenberg

September 11: arson attack on four vehicles of the Berlin-Charlottenburg public order office

A dubious organisation called the “militant group” (mg) took responsibility for some of the attacks at the time. According to Wikipedia, charges were brought against alleged members of the mg at the State Security Senate of the Berlin Kammergericht (court) in the summer of 2008. The following year, no objections were raised when the media reported that “the leading investigator at the Federal Criminal Investigation Agency (BKA) admitted to the Berlin Kammergericht” to having falsified evidence against three alleged members of the “militant group”.

Shortly thereafter, in July 2009, the “militant group” publicly announced its dissolution, and has since disappeared from the scene. The BKA has never revealed how many informers it had in the group, or whether these agents were involved in the preparation and execution of attacks.

The question once again arises whether and to what

extent state security organs are involved in the series of incendiary attacks. The Berlin *Tagesspiegel* newspaper indirectly draws attention to this question. In its August 17 edition, it comments: “An alarming suspicion is being voiced in security circles. The person who received a rather mild penalty last Wednesday for setting fire to a car might not have been the perpetrator after all”.

The article goes on to describe how Berlin’s Tiergarten district court imposed a suspended prison sentence of one year and 10 months on a man from the left-wing squatter milieu, because he had torched a BMW motor vehicle in Friedrichshain in mid-May. Having received the verdict, he was immediately released from custody. The current series of incendiary attacks began immediately afterwards.

A day later, the same newspaper conducted an interview with the incumbent Berlin head of police, Margaret Koppers, quoting her as saying: “I tend to suspect that there are scattered lone offenders, not yet rooted in the left-wing milieu, but trying to make a name for themselves in the scene in this way”.

What does this mean? What do the security forces really know? Has the arsonist from May been investigated since his verdict was delivered? Was the suspended sentence related to any deals made with the police or secret service?

What is certain is that the Berlin arson attacks have nothing in common with the youth rebellion in Britain. That was a rudimentary outburst of the frustration and anger of many thousands of young people, directed against a criminal and corrupt elite that is destroying the future of an entire generation.

The Berlin car burnings, however, involve the actions of cowardly individuals, directly targeting the people of the city, and serve a thoroughly reactionary purpose.

The PSG warns that a climate of fear is being created whereby right-wing parties and politicians will be able to press more effectively their demands for an upgrading of the police force and other apparatuses of the state.



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