

# State raids in Germany fuel Islamophobia

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In mid-June, German Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich banned the Islamist group Millatu Ibrahim for allegedly unconstitutional activities. Police carried out coordinated raids in several Germany states, involving 800 policemen who searched 82 apartments. The security forces confiscated large quantities of material, such as video equipment, laptops, cell phones and computers.

One man was arrested in a mosque in Solingen on the basis of an international arrest warrant issued in the United Kingdom. In addition, investigations were initiated against two other Salafist societies with the aim of finding evidence to justify a ban on their activities. Interior Minister Friedrich declared that the raids had been very “successful”.

The group Millatu Ibrahim is a very small grouping belonging to the fundamentalist Islamic minority of Salafists in Germany. Security agencies estimate there are around 4,000 Salafists in Germany. Other estimates put the figure at 2,500. The security forces have declared that 24 Salafists belong to the 130-strong group it alleges are potential terrorists. The group defends a reactionary literal interpretation of the Koran, recognises no secular government bodies or authorities, and acknowledges only Sharia, “God-given” law. In this respect, however, they are little different from Christian fundamentalists, who interpret the Bible literally but have not been subject to any state repression.

The Salafists are accused of attracting violent youths and converts to their ranks in order to incite terrorist acts. However, Interior Minister Friedrich and the security forces could not point to any crime committed by the group. Instead, Frederick accused the

organization of violating the “notion of ?constitutional order and international understanding”. The lack of any concrete evidence to justify the police actions, together with the anti-Islamic comments previously made by the minister, are a clear indication that the raids and ban are part of a targeted campaign to whip up hostility to Islam. This is confirmed by the prehistory of the raids.

Earlier this year, an extensive media campaign was launched against the Salafists when a group of them distributed free copies of the Koran in the pedestrian areas of German cities. The Bavarian Interior Ministry reacted by organising a raid of premises in Munich used by a subsidiary organization of the group, “True Religion”, which is alleged to have collected donations for the distribution of the Koran in pedestrian zones.

A leading role in the creation of anti-Islamic sentiments has also been played by extreme right organisations, the media and the security agencies themselves. In particular, there have been a number of provocations against Islamists by the far-right anti-Islamic Party, Pro NRW (Pro North Rhine-Westphalia). The subsequent clashes have then been heavily promoted in the media with the emphasis placed on the potential for violence on the part of “Islamist extremists”.

On April 30, the administrative court in Cologne and Dusseldorf lifted a ban on activities planned by the Pro NRW party. The party was then able to use a deliberate provocation against Islamists to create publicity for its campaign in the NRW state election.

On May 1, nearly two dozen pro-NRW election campaign supporters confronted about 60 Salafists in the town centre of Solingen. A massive police line separated the two groups. The right-wing extremists

marched to the Salafist mosque and began handing out anti-Muslim cartoons in order to provoke Islamists. The mass media then published pictures of Salafists throwing stones and trying to break through the police cordon, before they were forced to the ground by police.

The media reports and images of street violence were aimed at evoking the bitter fighting that took place in the same street in May 1993 following the fire-bombing of a Solingen house by fascists in which five Turkish women died.

Following sensational reports on the incident on May 1, a second demonstration of “less than 30 Pro NRW supporters” (*Frankfurter Rundschau*) assembled in Bonn on May 5 and were confronted with 500-600 protesters, who in turn were harangued by a massive turnout of police. Once again the extreme-right Pro NRW was able to provoke a confrontation that led to outbreaks of violence and numerous arrests.

One week later, Pro NRW recorded a vote of just 1.5 percent in the state election in the North Rhine-Westphalia state election. While rejected by the electorate, the party was able to achieve one of its electoral aims—having won more than 1 percent of the vote it was entitled to the reimbursement of its election costs.

While the openly racist Pro NRW party receives a windfall from the treasury, the Interior Ministry is undertaking an offensive against the Salafists. The ban on the group Millatu Ibrahim for alleged anti-constitutional activities is an attack on the organization and the basic right of freedom of religion. The same rationalization can be used to ban political organizations and must be vigorously rejected.



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