

Neo-Nazi attacks mayoral candidate in Cologne

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20 October 2015

On Saturday, a 44-year-old neo-Nazi, Frank S., attempted to assassinate mayoral candidate Henriette Reker in the city of Cologne as Reker campaigned in advance of Sunday's vote.

The assailant stabbed Reker in the neck and windpipe with a Bowie knife, causing life-threatening injuries. He then went on to assault four bystanders, one of whom was also seriously injured.

The evidence strongly indicates that S. was motivated by xenophobia. According to the Office of the Federal Prosecutor, which is investigating the incident, S. wanted to "send a signal of opposition to what he regarded as the ever-increasing number of refugees been taken in by Germany."

Reker, 58, was deputy mayor of Cologne and responsible for organising the accommodation of refugees. In line with a proposal by the Green Party, Reker, a lawyer who belonged to no party, ran for the post of mayor with the support of both the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the free market Free Democratic Party (FDP). Her candidacy was directed at breaking the political dominance of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which has held the mayoralty for the past six years.

Reker, who was placed in intensive care and an induced coma, won the election Sunday against six other candidates, receiving 53 percent of the vote. Her SPD rival, Jochen Ott, received just 32 percent. Reker had already been considered the favourite prior to the assassination attempt.

Her doctors have announced that she is out of danger, and associates assume that she will take over the mayoral post after her recovery.

In the 1990s, the would-be assassin Frank S. was either a supporter or member of the neo-Nazi Free German Workers' Party (FAP), which was later

banned. More recently, he has established a presence on the Internet with xenophobic comments.

Just before the knife attack, he shouted, "I am doing it for your children." According to Spiegel Online, the police officers who arrested him cited him as saying he was afraid that Sharia law would soon apply in Germany. The police also quoted him as declaring, "Foreigners are taking our jobs."

The available evidence suggests that S. carefully planned the attack. A police search of his apartment established that he had removed the hard drives from his computers. Officers were unable to find any notes, documents or papers in the apartment.

Reker has been repeatedly criticized by the Cologne Refugee Council for "inhumane" conditions in local refugee camps. She arranged for refugees to be put up in hardware stores, gymnasiums and tents.

However, unlike leading Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union politicians such as Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière and Bavarian Prime Minister Horst Seehofer, she has refrained from denouncing the refugees, adopting a similar tone to that of CDU Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has publicly called for a "welcoming culture."

Following the assassination attempt, numerous politicians rushed to place the blame on hate speech on the Internet along with xenophobic organizations. German Justice Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) stated: "Pegida has broken down inhibitions, enabling words to be turned into deeds." Interior Minister de Maizière (CDU) declared that the whole of society was called upon to send a clear message against all forms of violence. Representatives of all parliamentary parties called for a struggle against xenophobia.

In fact, all of the establishment political parties are responsible for the climate of hate that forms the

background to the attack.

The SPD candidate in Cologne, Jochen Ott, was quite prepared to invoke xenophobic resentments when he fell behind in the polls. In early October, he issued a call to stop using sports halls to accommodate refugees. “By the end of the year,” he argued, “the sports clubs and schools must be made available again.”

The closure of gyms, he declared, had a serious impact on the activities of clubs and school sports programs. Councillor Jörg Frank (Green Party) accused Ott of propagating “vague fears” and playing off “the plight of refugees against the needs of the local population.”

The SPD candidate’s campaign pitch echoed the type of right-wing populism employed by the far-right FPÖ in Austria.

Across the country, senior political and public figures are demanding that borders be reinforced. The CDU and CSU have agreed to set up transit zones at the border to incarcerate, process and deport refugees.

The German police union has publicly called for the erection of a border fence to stop refugees. Its chairman, Rainer Wendt, justified the demand to the newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* by claiming that a German fence would cause a chain reaction. “If we close our borders in this way,” he declared, “Austria will also close its border with Slovenia. This is exactly the effect we need.”

At the weekend, Chancellor Merkel traveled to Ankara to conclude a sordid deal with the authoritarian Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, aimed at sealing the Turkish-European border.

In other parts of Germany, refugees are being abused and humiliated in order to discourage them from seeking asylum. This is being done by state and local governments whether conservative or supposedly “left.” The conditions imposed on refugees in Berlin and Hamburg are equally appalling, causing aid organizations and medical associations to vigorously protest the treatment of the migrants.

Representatives of far-right movements such as Pegida are given prime time coverage on television and other media, while hundreds of thousands of pro-refugee volunteers are ignored and harassed by the authorities. On Sunday, Björn Höcke, a leader of the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD), was given free rein to spread his racist bile on the prime

time “Günther Jauch” talk show.

The announced topic was “Rabble-rousing, agitating, threatening—is hatred socially acceptable?” In March of this year, Höcke signed an appeal calling for a “resistance movement against the further erosion of sovereignty and identity in Germany.”

AfD founding member Alexander Gauland, ex-Pegida leader Kathrin Oertel, and CSU General Secretary Andreas Scheuer had already appeared on the talk show to whip up hatred against refugees.

Representatives of the German ruling elite are deliberately seeking to establish a new right-wing movement, aimed not only against refugees, but against all social and political opposition.

With the wave of refugees, the ceaseless wars in the Middle East waged by the United States in cooperation with its European allies have rebounded on Europe. Hundreds of thousands of people are being denied all social rights, including useful employment and a place to live. The drastic austerity program imposed in Greece makes clear that, as the economic and social crisis intensifies, the continent’s ruling elites have the same fate in store for broad layers of working people and youth.



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