

Testimony of German neo-Nazi covers up state involvement

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The reading of Beate Zschäpe's 53-page testimony to the Munich Higher Regional Court last week raises more questions than it answers. Zschäpe stands accused before the court of abetting ten murders, two bomb attacks, and 15 robberies, as well as committing arson and being a member of a terrorist organization.

The testimony, read in court by Zschäpe's lawyer Mathias Grasel, is completely implausible. Zschäpe claims she was neither involved in the bank robberies nor the murders laid at the door of the National Socialist Underground (NSU). The NSU is accused of carrying out ten murders between 2000 and 2007. Eight of the dead were ethnic Turks, but one Greek and one German police officer were also murdered.

Zschäpe claims that the sole perpetrators were her partner Uwe Mundlos and friend Uwe Böhnhardt. Mundlos and Böhnhardt were found dead in 2011, with police claiming that both committed suicide. Their deaths left only Zschäpe to stand trial and account for the group's actions—and its relationship to the German far-right and state security agencies.

Zschäpe claims that she was not a member of the NSU, and that she learned about the various murders from Mundlos and Böhnhardt only after they were committed. She described her reaction to these crimes as "speechless", "aghast", "horrified" and "shocked".

She said she still did not know the motive for the first murder, Enver ?im?ek in 2000, a florist in Nuremberg. As for the attack in Cologne in January 2001 that seriously wounded the 19-year-old daughter of an Iranian grocer, Zschäpe said that Böhnhardt placed an explosive device hidden in a cake while Mundlos waited outside.

The 2007 murder of police officer Michèle Kiesewetter, 22, in Heilbronn, and the serious wounding of a colleague, was meant to procure

weapons, Zschäpe's statement declared. The pistols belonging to Mundlos and Böhnhardt had been jamming and they wanted to steal the service weapons of the police officers. Only these two were responsible for the crime, she says in the statement.

The only crime to which Zschäpe confessed was burning down the group's shared apartment in Zwickau. In November 2011, when she had heard on the radio that a camper van had been discovered with two corpses, she said she was immediately certain it involved her friends. As had been previously agreed, she then obliterated all traces of evidence by burning down the flat.

Why had she lived for 13 years with the two right-wing terrorists? Out of love and affection, Zschäpe claimed, and not for political reasons. Several times she had told them both they should stop the killings, she said. Once, she even threatened to go to the police. The two allegedly responded by threatening to commit suicide. She regards herself as "morally" guilty but not criminally.

The cobbled together statement read out by her lawyer Grasel on Wednesday was an attempt to minimize Zschäpe's guilt. For the victims and their relatives, her "apology" was yet another slap in the face.

But Zschäpe's statement sheds light on a much more significant issue than her own defence. Her statements buttress the position of the prosecution, the investigating authorities and the intelligence services. It is noteworthy that Zschäpe did not name a single other accomplice or shed any light on other connections the three may have had.

The only exception to this wall of silence was her mention of the name Tino Brandt, who was already known to have received 200,000 Deutschmarks from

the secret service. This money was used to establish the right-wing movement out of which the NSU emerged. Without him, according to Zschäpe, many actions by the right-wing would not have been possible in Jena in the late 1990s.

Her testimony is dubious. Fire experts, for example, doubt that Zschäpe could have set the Zwickau apartment ablaze by herself. She claimed to have spent half an hour pouring gasoline and then set fire to the apartment. During this time, however, an explosive mixture would have developed. If Zschäpe had then ignited the fire, she herself would have been injured.

Her statements regarding the bomb attack in Cologne in 2001 are also questionable. A composite image created, based on the shop owner's description of the man who had left the basket with the bomb in the grocery store, did not match Böhnhardt. Instead it shows similarities to the neo-Nazi Johann Helfer from Cologne, who worked as a "secret supporter" for the North Rhine-Westphalia state secret service.

Zschäpe's explanation of the motive for the murder of the police officer Kiesewetter is absurd. Two neo-Nazis living underground, being sought nationwide, allegedly drove from their residence in Zwickau around 370 kilometres to Heilbronn and shot two randomly encountered police officers, using defective guns, in order to capture their weapons! They supposedly preferred this to the hitherto proven means of obtaining weapons from other neo-Nazis.

There is another question. Zschäpe has been on trial since May 2013. In 248 trial days, she had not said a word. Now she has spoken. Why?

Since the NSU fell apart four years ago, the intelligence agencies have destroyed numerous files that might have provided evidence of the involvement of their undercover agents in its crimes. Even so, some 25 undercover agents on the periphery of the NSU have been unmasked, and several parliamentary committees of inquiry have brought more evidence of state collusion to light. The unavoidable conclusion is that the NSU committed crimes under the eyes of, or with the direct participation of, the secret services.

Such is the evidence suggesting state collusion that calls for further parliamentary committees of inquiry have been put forward by politicians from various parties, including the co-chairs of the original NSU-committee of inquiry in the Bundestag, Clemens

Binninger (CDU, Christian Democratic Union), Petra Pau (Left Party), Irene Mihalic (Green Party) and Eva Högl (SPD, Social Democratic Party). At a joint press conference in October, the four declared that they had serious doubts that the murder of the police officer Michele Kiesewetter was a random act, and that they considered it almost impossible that the three Zwickau terrorists could have acted in secret so long on their own.

But it is exactly this that the Attorney General's Office has claimed since the beginning of the investigations. The murders of nine immigrants and a police officer are said to have been committed solely by Mundlos and Böhnhardt, with Zschäpe's support. With her statement to the court, Zschäpe has now supported this central thesis of the Attorney General.

This raises the question of the authorship of Zschäpe's statement. Its form and content and complex structure suggest that others were involved in the drafting apart from Zschäpe. It is noteworthy, in this regard, that she has refused to offer oral testimony, her lawyer having insisted that questions only be submitted and answered in writing.

It is also revealing that Zschäpe only answers questions from the court and not the joint plaintiffs. Their lawyers have repeatedly tried to clarify the role of the state and especially the intelligence services—a line of questioning which the prosecution and court have repeatedly rejected.



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