

After train attack in Bavaria

# German cop says politicians have no right to question police violence

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Immediately after Monday's bloody attack on train passengers in southern Germany by a 17-year-old Afghan refugee, Green Party politician Renate Künast spoke out. In a Twitter message, she queried why the attacker had been shot to death rather than incapacitated.

Her Twitter account was subsequently bombarded with ugly denunciations and aggressive hate mail. Any critique of the actions of the police, who killed the attacker with a shot to the head, is to be suppressed.

Particularly aggressive was the response of the head of the German police union, Rainer Wendt. He said the police were very well trained and knew exactly what had to be done in such dangerous situations. "We don't need any parliamentary smart asses," he said in a discussion with television channel N24. "Perhaps one should recommend in principle that in such situations, politicians should not tweet for 24 hours," he suggested to Künast in the *Saarbrücker Zeitung*.

That a parliamentary deputy had dared to question the activities of the security forces threw Wendt into a rage. He repeated in several interviews, "It is an extremely stupid question, one must say. From clueless politicians. And it is actually really annoying as well" (N24 interview).

Renate Künast is an executive member of the Greens and has been an elected member of the German parliament since 2002. She was minister for food, agriculture and consumer protection in the SPD/Green government led by Gerhard Schröder. She is currently chairwoman of the parliamentary legal affairs committee and one of 12 members of the elections committee, which determines the appointment of half of the judges on the Constitutional Court.

The WSWs does not support the Greens and has often and repeatedly sharply criticised their politics. But Künast's query about the actions of the police is entirely justified. According to prior reports, the 17-year-old attacker was fleeing. He did not have a firearm and had taken no hostages. No information has thus far been provided to suggest an immediate threat to the police or an emergency situation. Why the well-trained officers of the special forces command (SEK) unit could not subdue the young attacker without killing him remains unclear.

The "final and fatal shot," i.e., the intentional use of lethal force by the police, is strictly regulated by law. It is permitted only when "the use of non-lethal weapons offers no realistic prospect of success." The security forces are obliged to give an account of the circumstances of the shooting of the attacker.

The strict control of the police and all security forces by parliament is among the fundamental principles of parliamentary democracy. If such parliamentary oversight is abolished, the door is wide open to police arbitrariness and dictatorship.

The arrogant declarations by police union leader Wendt are utterly unacceptable. Wendt obviously cannot wait to shake off parliamentary oversight of the security forces and do away with democratic structures. His denunciation of the chair of the parliamentary legal affairs committee as a "parliamentary smart ass" is an attack on all elected democratic institutions. Wendt is also joining a long reactionary historical tradition.

It is well known that Kaiser Wilhelm II refused to enter the Reichstag, dismissing it as the "Reich's theatre of apes" or the "gossip shop." Adolf Hitler described the Reichstag as a "heap of blockheads and

weaklings arbitrarily thrown together.” Wendt’s diatribe against “parliamentary wiseacres” recalls this tradition.

The police union leader has repeatedly spouted reactionary and stupid statements. In October 2010, he praised the brutal use of water cannons, batons and pepper spray by the Stuttgart police against demonstrators protesting against the controversial Stuttgart 21 construction project, stating, “The methods used by the police must include weapons which cause pain, only then do they have an effect.” Up to 400 demonstrators were injured at the time.

One year later, Wendt demanded the accelerated introduction of temporary Internet data storage by the state, accusing the federal government of hindering the work of the intelligence agencies. And last year, Wendt demanded a stable border fence to effectively secure Germany’s external borders and direct the flood of refugees in a supposedly orderly manner.

However, his latest attack on the parliamentary system is qualitatively different. Wendt speaks on behalf of sections of the security apparatus that are acting with increasing independence and view parliamentary oversight committees with growing hostility.

Similar behaviour was displayed by security representatives at a parliamentary committee investigating the NSU terrorist attacks. Although it has already been proved that the security agencies had at least two-dozen informants around the right-wing terrorist “National Socialist Underground,” which was responsible for the murder of nine immigrants and a police officer, the security agencies sought to block the work of the investigative committee.

Files were shredded, blacked out or withheld. Witnesses refused to answer, became mysteriously ill, received no authorisation to testify from their political superiors or treated the committee with unconcealed arrogance.

Wendt’s agitation against “parliamentary smart asses” makes clear that the security apparatus is increasingly acting independently. Although it is made up of authorities bound by directives, it is functioning as a state within a state.

This development has emerged over a prolonged period. It is directly connected with the return of German militarism, which leading representatives of

the federal government announced two-and-a-half years ago. Ever since then, a systematic build-up of the state apparatus has taken place, accompanied by attacks on democratic rights.

Already, the strategy paper “New Power, New Responsibilities,” which prepared the foreign policy shift, contains a lengthy section on the “domestic state dimension of German foreign policy.” It concentrated on the question of how “problems of legitimacy” and opposition from a “sceptical public” could be overcome. In other words: how the opposition to militarism and war could be suppressed.

The return of militarism is directly bound up with the return of police arbitrariness and domestic state repression. It is significant that nobody within the political or media establishment has responded to the police union leader’s reactionary attack.

Instead, Künast was also criticised from her own ranks for the tweet. “In such a situation, only the police can decide and determine how they have to deal with it,” Greens’ foreign policy spokesman Omid Nouripour told N24, adding, “And we must have the fundamental trust that in a difficult situation, they will do the right thing. That can’t be judged from afar.”

Künast’s statement was made “in the heat of the moment,” and had been “not particularly clever,” said Nouripour.



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