

# The Munich shooting spree and the Americanization of German society

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The Munich shooting spree has unleashed a wave of consternation and sympathy throughout Germany. It was a heinous act. Late on Friday afternoon, an 18-year-old youth shot dead nine, mainly young people, injuring a further 27, ten seriously, in a McDonald's restaurant and a popular shopping center.

A massive police response followed. Some 2,300 members of the security forces were brought into the city, including special units from other federal states, the GSG 9 anti-terrorist unit of the federal police and the Austrian Cobra Task Force. Armored vehicles and helicopters were also deployed. On Saturday, it became clear that Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen had also considered using the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces), placing a military police unit on standby, although such a deployment is unconstitutional.

The security forces brought the city of Munich, with its population of 1.5 million, literally to a standstill. The Central Station was cordoned off, train and underground traffic halted and tram drivers instructed to urge their passengers to leave the vehicle and return to their depots. Thousands ended up on the streets without any means of getting home, and this was despite the police calling on the population to return home on safety grounds. The situation only calmed down after Munich residents, in a spontaneous initiative under the hashtag #opendoor, offered to take those who had become stranded into their homes.

In the panic triggered by the huge police operation, reports of other shootings in the city began circulating, all of which proved to be false alarms. Between 6 p.m. and midnight, the police registered 4,310 emergency calls, as many as are usually received in four days.

On Sunday, when the police finally announced that the attack had been a classic mass shooting, carried out by a single perpetrator who had no political background or links to Islamic State, the population felt "something

approaching relief," as the Munich-based *Süddeutsche Zeitung* put it. Following the recent attacks in Nice and Würzburg, many people were clearly afraid that a similar vicious circle to the one in France would develop, where terrorist attacks, tougher state powers, the destruction of democratic rights and the growth of far-right forces each aggravated the other.

Nevertheless, the individual killing assault in Germany raises fundamental social and political issues. Such a brutal act by a teenager cannot be understood outside of more general social developments. The police response, as well as the reaction of many media outlets and politicians, shows that the tragic event is being used to justify a new law-and-order campaign.

The 18-year-old offender, David S., who killed himself after the rampage, held both German and Iranian passports and grew up in Germany. He lived with his parents in Maxvorstadt, a better-off suburb of Munich, where areas of public housing also exist. His father works as a taxi driver, and neighbors described the family as "down-to-earth." David was said to be quiet, to have had problems at school and, according to the public prosecutor, to have suffered from a depressive illness.

In his room, police found documents suggesting that the teenager was fascinated by mass shootings in Germany. The fact that last Friday was the fifth anniversary of the attack by Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people in Norway, has led investigators to believe there is a connection.

There are also indications that David S. used a fake Facebook account, under the name "Selina Akim," to lure teenagers to the McDonald's restaurant where he began his rampage, indicating he had carefully planned and prepared it. Eight of his nine victims were aged between 14 and 20 years old.

Little is known at this point about the motives of the perpetrator. In an exchange with a local resident, who

filmed David S., he screams, “Because of you I have been bullied for seven years. And now I have had to buy a gun to bump you all off.”

The Munich rampage is not the first in Germany: in 2002, a teenager killed 17 people at an Erfurt school. Four years later, a similar case took place in Emsdetten. The same year, a minor stabbed 30 people in a Berlin underground train. In 2009, a 17-year-old killed 15 people in Winnenden, and only last week, a 17-year-old attacked travelers with an axe on a regional train in Würzburg. Nevertheless, the frequency of such violence has so far been regarded primarily as an American phenomenon.

According to the web site “Gun Violence Archive,” there were 18 mass murders with firearms in the United States just this June. In 2014, the FBI reported 8,124 homicides with firearms. In the US, about the same number of people are killed by firearms as in car accidents.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has repeatedly insisted that such recurring mass violence can only be the “expression of something deeply diseased within society.” A month ago, the WSWS stressed the connection between the Orlando massacre, in which 49 people were killed, and the ongoing US-led wars, the militarization of social life, and the attacks on the jobs, wages and living conditions of the working class.

“It is almost impossible to exaggerate the impact of this daily reality within the borders of the United States, especially on the most unstable social elements,” we wrote. “Political reaction, national chauvinism, anti-immigrant racism—the most backward sentiments have been systematically cultivated in order to pursue an agenda of imperialist war and the impoverishment of the working class.”

A similar social development is underway in Germany. When David S. was born, the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) were being deployed on their first foreign combat mission, in Yugoslavia. When he was 16, the German government announced the “end of military restraint.” In the meantime, the Bundeswehr has participated in the NATO deployment against Russia and a total of 16 foreign missions, including in Iraq and Syria. Militarism is increasingly influencing domestic policy.

Last year, David S. would have directly experienced how refugees from the Middle East had initially been welcomed by the Munich population and then vilified by politicians. The campaign against this “welcoming culture,” led mainly by the Christian Social Union (CSU) Bavarian state government, would not have been without

its effect on a mentally unstable young man with an Iranian background, who felt bullied. Of course, all these circumstances motivate brutal acts only in extreme cases. But without them, his actions would have been inconceivable.

Politicians and the media have responded to the Munich rampage by demanding an accelerated militarization of society and a further political shift to the right. They are trying to outdo one another in praising the massive police operation and demanding a further expansion of the security forces.

Chancellor Angela Merkel directed remarks at the police, saying, “They were and are, in the best sense, helpers and protectors of the citizens.” The leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Sigmar Gabriel, tweeted that what the police had done was “great.”

The far-right Alternative for Germany immediately called for the complete closure of the country’s borders to refugees even though the background to the Munich attack was still unclear. Its chairman in Saxony-Anhalt, André Poggenburg, expressed his disgust with Merkel and the “Left-wing idiots who share the responsibility.”

Some Christian Democratic politicians are singing the same tune. CSU federal parliamentary deputy Florian Hahn said on Twitter that the Bundeswehr would be needed in the next few days for the “establishment of security in public spaces.” And the Dresden Christian Democratic Union (CDU) politician Maximilian Krah wrote, “I am in Munich. This must be the turning point: The welcoming culture is deadly. It’s about our country!”

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* saw in the assault “a very worrying foretaste of next year’s [general] election campaign.” If the world situation failed to calm down abruptly in the next few months, “security” would be the “mega-theme” of the election. “Namely, both internal and external security, because these can no longer be separated from each other.”

In other words, the newspaper assumes that even the German election campaign will be “Americanized” and will take on forms similar to those in the US, where a fascistic real estate mogul and a politician with extremely close ties to Wall Street and the Pentagon are conducting a dirty, mud-slinging fight for the presidency.



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