

“New Year’s Eve in Cologne”: The scapegoating of Muslims and refugees deepens

Lena Sokoll
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In Cologne as well as in other cities, this year’s New Year’s Eve celebrations were accompanied by a martial police operation. The number of state police was increased tenfold to 1,500. An additional 300 federal police and 600 crowd control police patrolled Cologne. The cathedral was surrounded by 40 newly-installed surveillance cameras and bag checks were instituted in the area around it.

In a clear case of racial profiling the German police stopped and controlled the papers of hundreds of dark-skinned men in and around the central station and environs. Police used a special racist designation—NAFRIs—to identify their victims.

One year after the events in Cologne on New Year’s Eve, it has become clear what really happened in 2016. Pickpocket gangs often engage in so-called “distraction scams” or sexual provocations at such events as the Munich Oktoberfest or various carnival festivities, but this time they were blown out of all proportion and used to whip up a racist hate campaign against refugees and Muslims.

This racist campaign served as a pretext for restricting fundamental democratic rights. The right to asylum was largely eliminated and the law on sexual crimes was expanded. The state apparatus was built up on a scale unprecedented during the period after World War II.

Racist slogans of the kind spread by the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Pegida were introduced into the political mainstream. Sympathy for refugees, which was widespread in the German and European population, was denounced as “naïveté” and a security risk.

The clearest evidence that the “events on New Year’s Eve 2016 in Cologne” were a hysterical fiction is the police and court investigations that took place afterwards. The findings of the investigations make it clear that nothing more happened last year than what always accompanies the consumption of a large amount of alcohol at such crowded gatherings.

Proceedings were initiated against 330 accused and only 30 cases made it to sentencing. Only three of these cases involved a finding connected with a sexual crime. The legal

proceedings reveal a picture of young petty criminals, who were fined or given suspended sentences for crimes such as cell phone theft.

The real criminal party in the “events in Cologne on New Year’s Eve” was the police campaign against foreigners, which was organized in the following days and in which all political parties and the entire media without exception took part. This campaign continues to this day.

However, the fact that only three of the accused were sentenced for sexual crimes is now being used to justify a further arming of the state. Federal Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière sharply criticized the investigating authorities and the judiciary at the end of 2016. “It is completely incomprehensible that after such a large number of sexual attacks so few perpetrators have been sentenced. I view that as a problem,” said the CDU politician to the *Bild am Sonntag*. The judiciary should “judge with all harshness.” In addition, he said that the trials lasted far too long. The thrust of these remarks is clear: there should be speedy trials handing out tough sentences, even if without evidence.

Let us review the facts once again.

The events at the main train station in Cologne on New Year’s Eve a year ago were the object of an extensive police investigation as well as hearings and inquiries on the state and national level. It has been established as fact that approximately 1,000 people were involved in festivities outside the train station and in the neighbouring grounds of the cathedral, that firecrackers were set off and that much alcohol was consumed. In and around the train station there was pickpocketing and in some cases the victims were distracted by jostling and groping.

The police evacuated the square shortly before midnight because of the danger of mass panic caused by the launching of fireworks, but later allowed people to return. After the reports of theft and sexual harassment came in, the police assembled a force of 150 and accompanied women to the train station. In the train station itself, there were 70 police on duty. The operation was so normal from the point of view of the police that the next day there was talk of a “relaxed

deployment situation.”

Thomas Fischer, a federal judge in Karlsruhe recalled in his regular column in the *Zeit* that the situation is the same or worse every year at the Cologne Carnival or the Munich Oktoberfest. It is sad that this happens, but it had never before prompted a larger debate.

However, a campaign was initiated at the beginning of January to discover a “collapse of civilization” and “new form of organized criminality” in the Cologne events. In a blanket designation, the “perpetrators” at the Cologne Main Train Station were identified as refugees and North Africans and the crimes committed were from then on no longer presented as pickpocketing, but as the expression of “Muslim norms of masculinity” (Julia Klöckner, state president of the CDU in Rhineland-Palatinate).

North Rhine Westphalia Interior Minister Ralf Jäger (Social Democratic Party, SPD) told the Cologne tabloid *Express*: “We do not tolerate groups of North African men organizing in order to degrade defenceless women with bold sexual attacks.”

The number of reports rose dramatically from 100 on New Year’s Eve to more than 1,200 in the following days. The reports included 500 sexual attacks. However, in spite of all the investigations and inquiries, there is still no detailed analysis of the supposed victims. Anyone can suddenly claim to have been harassed at the Cologne Main Train Station at the time in question. In the end, there were more criminal charges than participants.

The only thing that is certain is that representatives of the intelligence agencies and the security apparatus had already sharply attacked the refugee policy of the Merkel government weeks earlier and that the Cologne New Year’s Eve events were dramatically exaggerated and exploited for the purpose of a racist campaign. At the same time, fundamental democratic rights were restricted, the law on sexual crimes was expanded as a result of New Year’s Eve in Cologne and a massive expansion of domestic repression was initiated.

Moreover, the hysterical campaign concerning the New Year’s Eve events in Cologne had an even more specific political function. The supposedly massive attacks by aggressive groups of men on defenceless women were used as a pretext by the Left Party and its pseudo-left appendages to advocate the arming of the state and to integrate themselves into ruling class politics.

The Left Party did not view the debate about the events on New Year’s Eve as an attack on asylum and civil liberties, but stood on the side of a strong state in the name of the fight against sexual violence and for the rights of women.

The Left Party in Cologne welcomed a situation in which “in the future the police will be reinforced in troubled spots

during public celebrations.”

The Left Party factional heads in federal parliament, Sahra Wagenknecht and Dietmar Bartsch, are using the events in Cologne as a pretext for advocating the arming of the state. Bartsch declared that the problem is the “inadequately equipped police” and—in the budget debate in parliament in September—he demanded “a state more capable of action.” This would include “well trained and equipped personnel in public service, especially in the police.” Wagenknecht is openly cozying up to the right wing. Speaking on New Year’s Eve in Cologne, she said: “whoever abuses the right to hospitality, has also lost the right to hospitality.”

The pseudo-left groups surrounding the Left Party have also taken advantage of the opportunity and called for a strengthening of the state and police apparatus under the cloak of “anti-sexism.” For instance, the SAV in Cologne expressed the view that sexual attacks can be prevented with police presence and deployments. Addressing the New Year’s Eve events, they said, “if the police had stayed in the square, the attacks could not have taken place.”

The long-time Pabloite Angela Klein wrote in January 2016 in *International Viewpoint*: “The left cannot compensate the state’s failures by its own structures. Therefore women have no choice but to demand sharper laws, which force the police to act.”

The year that began with a racist campaign connected with the New Year’s Eve events in Cologne ended with the attack in the Christmas market in Berlin by someone whose close connections with the intelligence agencies are becoming increasingly clear. This event was also used immediately to attack foreigners and to continue arming the police and the state.

Immediately following the attack in Berlin, the police were supplied with sub-machine guns everywhere in Germany, including Cologne, to conduct armed patrols of cities. The intensification of state sponsored animosity toward refugees and the campaign for a massive arming of the state apparatus in recent days show that growing sections of the ruling class are aiming for a much more right-wing government despite Merkel’s about-face in refugee policy.



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