

New Year's Eve in Cologne, Germany: Racist agitation and state repression

Dietmar Henning
5 January 2017

The huge police deployment in Cologne on New Year's Eve has served as the pretext for virulent racism and calls for the strengthening of the state apparatus.

Politicians and media are attempting to outdo each other with racist outbursts. They employ the cliché of “criminal North Africans,” shortened to “Nafri,” who possess “basic aggressiveness” and are all “multiple offenders.”

The vastly exaggerated events of New Year's Eve in Cologne a year ago served as the pretext for a campaign targeting refugees and foreigners. This time around, it was exploited to justify a vast build-up of police forces in several major cities.

In Cologne alone, 1,500 state police, 300 federal police and 600 state law enforcement officials were mobilized. In the course of the night, Cologne Police President Jürgen Mathies demanded additional forces, resulting in a further 200 police officers being deployed.

The hundreds of police deliberately targeted foreigners or those they took to be foreigners. Thousands of visitors who came to Cologne for New Year's Eve were for all intents and purposes singled out. The police wrote on Twitter, “Hundreds of Nafri are currently being checked at the main train station. Information to follow.”

The police divided up new arrivals at the train station on the basis of racial criteria. Women were rapidly let through.

According to the *Rheinische Post*, “those who did not correspond to a ‘North African’ profile were able to use a separate exit to the street. All others were directed through an exit that included personal checkpoints.” A large number of young men were kettled by the police in front of the train station. A police spokesman told journalists that the issue was merely “teething problems.”

On New Year's Eve, everyone with dark skin, hair or eyes—irrespective of their behavior or nationality—was a target. In total, the police collected personal data from 1,700 people. Around 900 young men—overwhelmingly

North Africans—were issued with a ban from the city centre and immediately sent back to the train station, where the federal police directed them onto trains. Others had to wait for up to three hours to get out of the police kettle. Of those stopped and searched, 92 were taken into custody.

The police authorities and politicians defended their racist actions, known as “racial profiling” and the federal government explicitly thanked the police.

Although police president Mathies expressed disappointment at the use of the term “Nafri” for North Africans in the police tweet, because this was merely an “internal working concept” for the police, he vehemently defended carrying out personal checks according to this criterion.

From the experience the police gained from New Year's Eve 2015, and a series of raids, according to Mathies, “a definite impression has emerged as to which people need to be checked”—i.e. “Nafri.” Wolfgang Wurm from the federal police added, “We spoke to people relevant to investigations and questioned their intent.” He left no doubt about the fact that this practice would be continued.

The media has also based its reporting on the “experience gained” from New Year's Eve 2015. Even though only 33 people were convicted after an extensive investigation, and just three for sexual crimes, the lies about mass sexual assaults were presented as if they were facts.

When a few dared to mildly criticise the use of the term “Nafri” and racial profiling, a wave of outrage was unleashed. Green Party chairwoman Simone Peter was sharply attacked when on New Year's Day she described as “utterly unacceptable” the use of “derogatory terms for groups like ‘Nafri’ by organs of the state.”

The co-chair of the Greens, Cem Özdemir, told *Spiegel Online* that the police had acted “appropriately” and

thereby guaranteed security. “Many people with a high potential for aggressiveness” had travelled to Cologne, asserted the Green chair.

The Green Party’s parliamentary group chair, Katrin Göring-Eckardt, told the Dortmund-based *Ruhr Nachrichten*, “It was correct to act quickly and preventively, to ensure the security of all people in Cologne.” The interior policy spokesperson for the Greens, Irene Mihalic, herself a former police officer, rejected the “general criticism of checkpoints” in an interview with *Die Welt*.

The Green Party mayor of Tübingen, Boris Palmer, who campaigns for more deportations to Syria, wrote on Facebook on Monday, “Specific answers to specific problems is not racism, but necessary.”

Simone Peter, having been brought to heel, described her criticism as too rapid and ill-considered. “It was right to act quickly and preventively here,” she said in a second statement.

While the Greens defended the strengthening of repressive arm of the state, racism flourished in the media. The studio director at WDR radio in Cologne, Lothar Lenz, commented, “They were there again—the hordes of men prepared for violence—but this time there was luckily enough police waiting.” Lenz argued it was a mistake to defame the operation as racist. “Just because officers identified potential perpetrators at the train station by their appearance and checked them? Yes, but how else should they have done it?”

The *Bild* newspaper provided a platform for Christian Social Union secretary Andreas Scheuer, who stated, “We cannot allow idealistic multi-cultural dreaming to become a security risk for the population.”

And in his blog on the web site of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “Don Alphonso” railed under the title, “Very populist questions for the Nafris, politicians and police after Cologne.” The pseudonym belongs to Rainer Meyer, who describes his pen name as an “artistic figure,” so as not to be bound by journalistic protocol and political correctness.

In a question directed “to the Nafris,” he asked, “Why do you and your friends exhibit ‘basic aggressiveness’?” To the politicians he wrote, “The Nafris were checked on one evening.” What would happen on the other 364 evenings in the year? “Is it not necessary? Are they simply risky groups on New Year’s Eve?” He had the impression that “we now have a kind of temporary internal state of siege.”

The right-wing racist tirades from politicians and the

media are a response to the rapidly intensifying capitalist crisis. Social inequality is growing rapidly and ever larger amounts of money are being spent on the military and wars which the majority of the population opposes. In anticipation of major class conflicts, a massive apparatus of state repression is being constructed.

Just two days after New Year, Interior Minister de Maizière declared in a guest contribution for the *FAZ* that in light of the current challenges from “terrorism, large influxes of asylum seekers and cyberattacks,” it was necessary to give the intelligence agencies more powers.

De Maizière intends to place the domestic intelligence agencies, with their 16 state organisations, fully under the control of the federal state. The federal criminal office (BKA) is to receive the power to enforce custody prior to deportation, over other agencies. The powers of the federal police are also to be significantly strengthened in the areas of “random police checks and cyber attacks.”

De Maizière called for a “national pooling of forces” to carry out deportations. Rejected asylum seekers are to be taken into custody more easily. He intends to conduct deportations more rapidly: “I propose that the federal state obtains additional authority over the ending of the period of residence.” In this way, rejected asylum seekers could be “immediately dealt with.” To this end, he proposed the establishment of prisons which he termed “federal departure centres,” remarking, “Departure centres are already legal and could preferably be established close to German airports.”



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact