

Germany: The social and political background of the fatal rampage in Münster

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The motives of the driver responsible for the rampage in the northwest German city of Münster, which killed two people on Saturday, are still unclear. Even if the evidence points to personal motives, links to the extreme right-wing milieu cannot be excluded. In any case, the terrible act throws a spotlight on an increasingly brutalized society.

The police assume that the 48-year-old Jens R. drove a camper van into a group of people who were sitting in the outdoor area of a restaurant in the centre of Münster at 15:27. Two people were killed, a 51-year-old woman from the Lüneburg district and a 65-year-old man from the Borken district. More than 20 other people were seriously injured. Four of them were still in mortal danger on Sunday. Seconds after the attack, the perpetrator shot himself.

According to the investigators, it was the action of an individual. Two people who, according to initial testimonies, jumped out of the vehicle shortly before the impact had turned out to be particularly loud passers-by, according to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper. Also, it appears there is no indication of a connection to terrorist circles.

However, in the dead man's apartment in Münster, police found a lifelike model of an AK-47 (Kalashnikov) machine gun, a gas cylinder and a so-called *Polenböll* (explosive). In addition to this apartment, Jens R. had also rented a storage facility in Münster and two other apartments in the Saxony towns of Pirna and Heidenau, which were also searched by the police. "The first, but already intense review has revealed no evidence of a political background," said a police spokesman.

The police have provided hardly any information about R. and his motives. However, numerous details about his life have come to public attention. The

Süddeutsche Zeitung reports that R. had been a rather wealthy furniture designer who following great professional success then failed. After this, his situation further worsened. He had made serious accusations against neighbours, doctors and his parents.

In the apartment in Pirna, investigators found an 18-page text in which R. outlined his life story. In it, he reports serious problems with his parents, guilt complexes, a nervous breakdown and recurring mental breakdowns and early thoughts of suicide. He also described aggressive outbreaks and behavioural disorders. In 2014, for example, he smashed up his parents' furniture with a hatchet.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* also reports on a suicide letter, which R. sent on March 29 to various acquaintances. Although there was no hint of a rampage, there was of suicide. According to newsweekly *Der Spiegel*, a neighbour forwarded the text to the police. The police had established the suicidal thoughts, but could not find R. Even the social psychiatric service of the city of Münster knew of R's mental health problems, because he had approached them earlier. Apparently, there had already been a previous suicide attempt and the police had probably already stated in previous charges against him that he had mental health problems.

Even if all this indicates that R. acted out of personal motives, a connection to the far-right milieu cannot be ruled out. According to *Tagesspiegel*, as early as Saturday, security experts had suggested that there could have been contact with right-wing extremists. On Sunday, it was reported that a right-wing extremist known to the authorities lives in the property in Pirna in which R. rented an apartment. The Saxony state criminal police are checking if there is a connection. The investigators in Münster are also investigating

possible contacts with the city's neo-Nazi scene.

Even if there were no direct contacts with right-wing extremists, one can only understand a heinous act such as the rampage conducted by R. in connection with the brutalization of society. Personal motives, which were apparently abundant in R's life, can only lead to such a monstrous act under certain social conditions. And these have intensified extremely in recent years.

Almost every day, the witch-hunting of refugees takes on ever more aggressive forms. In the terrible machinery of deportation that has been set in motion with the support of all the establishment political parties, xenophobia has become the official policy. Now, the grand coalition government of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats has announced a massive stepping up of the powers of the state apparatus at home and Germany's military capacity abroad. The military budget is to be doubled. Already, German soldiers in Afghanistan and Syria are involved in serious war crimes. This brutalization is preparing the ground for heinous acts such as the mass shooting that took place in Munich in July 2016.

It is therefore all the more repellent when various politicians and media outlets use the killings in Münster to call for increased state powers and to agitate against refugees.

About an hour after the crime, the deputy parliamentary leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), Beatrix von Storch claimed there was a relationship between the government's refugee policy and the rampage. She tweeted without comment the statement made by Chancellor Angela Merkel in the summer of 2015 in relation to the reception and integration of refugees: "We can do it." Even when Jens R. was established as the prime suspect, Storch said he was "mimicking Islamic terrorism" and wrote, "Islam will attack again."

Her party colleague and parliamentary deputy Norbert Kleinwächter tweeted in relation to the attack: "When will this government understand that these deluded Islamists, these crazy time-bombs ... simply don't belong to Germany?" In this way, he not only imputed an Islamist motivation behind the crime, but, like Storch, made not terrorists and Islamic fundamentalists but Islam as a whole responsible for terror.

Such brazen witch-hunting was not limited to just the

AfD. In a commentary for *Die Welt*, Rainer Haubrich wrote on Sunday, "Although it was soon established that Münster was not an Islamist attack, everyone knew that given the chance, it could have been one." From this, he draws the conclusion that Germany needs a new security law, like the state of emergency introduced in France following the Paris attacks, and which abrogates fundamental democratic rights. It is now well known that all the terrorists in France had close links with the secret services. The same applies to Anis Amri, whose attack on the Berlin Christmas market in December 2016 killed twelve people.



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