

Germany: Angry protests against verdicts in trial of neo-Nazi NSU

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Protests took place in several cities over the weekend against the verdicts in the trial of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground (NSU). Protesters criticized the fact that over the course of the trial, which lasted five years and included 438 trial days, more was hushed up than revealed. Speakers at the protests demanded “comprehensive clarification”—that the verdict should not be the end of the affair.

Auschwitz survivor Esther Bejerano spoke on Saturday at a protest rally in Hamburg. “From today, I am part of the revenge of the families of the NSU victims and you are part of my revenge on National Socialism,” she said defiantly.

On Wednesday, the Munich Higher Regional Court (OLG) delivered its verdicts in the trial of the right-wing terrorist NSU. The main defendant, Beate Zschäpe, was sentenced to life imprisonment as an accomplice in the 10 murders and several attacks involving explosives, as well as for membership of a terrorist group and committing serious arson. But all other defendants received mostly lenient sentences.

Above all, however, the Federal Prosecutor’s Office and Presiding Judge Manfred Götzl deliberately blotted out any further information about the background to the NSU and about its supporters, in particular the role of state-paid informers.

Former far-right German National Party functionary Ralf Wohlleben was sentenced to 10 years in prison because he and defendant Carsten Schultze had procured the Ceska murder weapon, with which nine murders were carried out. Court reports described how Wohlleben responded to the verdict with relief. Since he had already spent much of the trial in custody, he can expect to be released in about three years.

Carsten Schultze was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment for the same offence, because juvenile

law was applied due to his being a minor at the time of the crime and the court viewed his confession and statement about Wohlleben’s assistance to be positive.

Defendant Holger Gerlach was sentenced to three years imprisonment for supporting a terrorist group after he admitted he had supplied the NSU trio with a weapon and false papers.

There was particular anger at the lenient sentence for the defendant André Eminger, who was also given two years and six months in prison for supporting a terrorist group. Against the demands of the Federal Prosecutor’s Office, he was not found guilty of aiding and abetting attempted murder. He was accused of having been involved in the bomb attack in the Cologne Probsteigasse. Judge Götzl then even declared that the previous detention of Eminger was no longer proportionate, to the cheers of about a dozen neo-Nazis present. Eminger left the courtroom a free man.

Already during the trial on Wednesday, several hundred had gathered in front of Munich’s courthouse to protest the verdicts and the cover-up of the neo-Nazi network. As a representative of the co-plaintiffs, attorney Alexander Hoffmann said that the verdict of the Higher Regional Court had set a “beacon” for the militant and armed neo-Nazi scene in Germany. The message was that “Nazis can kick off and murder people, and that they only get two years for supporting them. That’s a challenge!” Hoffmann also compared the verdicts with the harsh crackdown on left-wing demonstrators at the G20 summit in Hamburg last summer: “They got more for throwing a stone at the G20. ... The [NSU] verdict may be legal; it is not legitimate.”

Representatives of the NSU-Watch blog, which has critically followed the trial and numerous committees of inquiry, commented sharply on the verdict: “This

verdict is a slap in the face for the family members of those murdered by the NSU and the survivors of NSU terror.” The verdict and its rationale were “an invitation to the terrorist neo-Nazi scene: they can carry on almost with impunity where the NSU stopped in 2011,” a spokeswoman for the blog, Caro Keller, said. In particular, the mild verdicts against Wohlleben and Eminger showed “that the acts of support of two convinced Nazis, who also openly demonstrated this conviction in court, have been trivialized and depoliticized as supposed friendly support.”

In fact, both the Federal Prosecutor’s Office and the lower court had gone to great lengths to disregard any political context, and in particular the role of the Secret Service, thereby taking them out of the line of fire. In the indictment, the Federal Prosecutor’s Office declared that the NSU had “never been a network” but was “a singular association of three persons.”

Shortly after the fledgling right-wing terrorist group fell apart in November 2011, the initial extent of the neo-Nazi structures behind the three main actors and the massive state involvement by undercover operatives became apparent. In the meantime, it is known that approximately 140 people were involved with the NSU, some 40 of whom were active and worked for a total of seven different security agencies, sometimes committing many crimes.

The best-known among them is Tino Brandt, who worked for the Thuringia state secret service for seven years from 1994 to 2001, collecting about 200,000 deutschmarks—money he claims to have fully invested in building the right-wing extremist scene. Brandt was also a co-founder of the “Thüringer Heimatschutz” (THS, Thuringia Homeland Defence), in which Beate Zschäpe and the two other deceased perpetrators of the NSU “trio,” Uwe Mundlos and Uwe Böhnhardt, were also active.

Immediately after information about the NSU became known, the systematic cover-up of the state agents active in the environment surrounding the terrorists began. Already in the first days, hundreds of files related to the right-wing extremist scene in Thuringia were shredded by the secret service. The Federal Prosecutor’s Office employed legal tricks to successfully protect the person responsible (code name “Lothar Lingen”) from having to make a public statement at the trial in Munich. Nobody has been

charged with the destruction of evidence, as also happened with the burned-out motorhome of the trio in Eisenach.

Instead, the cover-up of the state’s involvement continues. Two weeks before the Munich verdict was announced, the investigative committee of the Hesse state parliament discussed an internal report of the Hesse state secret service, which referenced information and “mistakes” of the authorities in dealing with the NSU. In Kassel in northern Hesse, an agent of the Hesse secret service was present during the NSU murder of Halit Yozgat at his Internet cafe and it could be proved the agent had made false statements. The above mentioned report has been sealed for 120 years.

Meanwhile, since last year alone it has become known that there must be more right-wing networks inside the state apparatus. For example, army officer Franco A. had planned attacks, which he then wanted to blame on Syrian refugees. For this purpose, he had not only procured weapons and ammunition and a false identity as a refugee, but also worked with accomplices, some of whom were also employed by the Bundeswehr (armed forces). One of the alleged supporters is now working for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) member of parliament Jan Nolte. In a scandalous decision, the Frankfurt am Main Higher Regional Court had announced in early June that Franco A. was not being charged with the preparation of a serious criminal offence.

The NSU trial before the Munich Higher Regional Court and the verdicts given on July 10 show how closely right-wing extremism is linked with parts of the state apparatus. After a far-right terrorist group was able to murder immigrants unhindered for years and any state involvement was covered up after they broke apart, all those involved in the series of terrorist attacks have now received the message to continue unabated. Of the more than 100 far-right and partly state-paid NSU supporters, apart from a few exceptions, all are at large.



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