

German government and police unite with far-right to clamp down on press freedom in Dresden

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An intervention by the police against a camera crew in Dresden has shed light on the close ties between the German government, police and right-wing extremists.

The camera crew from the television channel ZDF, which was filming a protest by the far-right Pegida movement against a visit by German Chancellor Angela Merkel on August 16, was detained by the police for 45 minutes following a provocation by a demonstrator. They were questioned and prevented from carrying out their work. Both Saxony's Minister President Michael Kretschmer and the Dresden police chief Horst Kretschmar backed the police and endorsed the attack on press freedom. It subsequently emerged that the Pegida demonstrator who provoked the incident is an employee of the state criminal police (LKA).

This is not the first time that the police have stood by as right-wing extremists attack journalists, or even pursued the victims. The German Journalists Association (DJV) has maintained the blog augenzeugen.info (eyewitness.info) for two-and-a-half years to document these incidents. The incident in Dresden attracted nationwide attention because the attack was on ZDF, one of the largest public broadcasters, and the journalists documented it as it happened.

Reporter Arndt Ginzler, who works for the ZDF program "Frontal 21," published a video online that left no doubt about what took place. He commented on the video, "Saxony police officers become agents of Pegida/AfD supporters and block TV team."

The video features Pegida supporters shouting slogans as they marched along the street. A man wearing sunglasses and a Germany hat then turns around, shouts "lying media," approaches the camera, and threatens the cameraman, "You filmed my face. You're not allowed to do that. Frontal shot. You have committed a criminal offense."

A few meters away, half a dozen police officers hang around their police car and do not respond to the incident. They only approach when the demonstrator calls them, and then they question the journalists. "This is now a police operation," says one of the officers, when a journalist demands a justification.

Saxony Minister President Michael Kretschmer immediately

gave his backing to the actions of the police. "The only people who appeared serious in this video were the police," he commented on Twitter. He told DPA that as minister president, his job was to defend the police officers, adding, "And that's what I'm doing."

Even as protests mounted, those responsible in Dresden maintained their defense of the police actions. Police chief Horst Kretschmar dismissed the accusation that the police had hindered press freedom. A criminal complaint was presented, "which left us with no alternative," he said.

In reality, according to Ginzler, a demonstrator only made a criminal complaint for insulting behavior after the police questioning was long underway. And this had obviously caused confusion, he said.

The accusation that the cameraman committed an offense by filming the demonstrator against his will is also wrong. "Pictures of meetings, marches and similar events in which the pictured people participated" are explicitly allowed to be shared without their permission, according to paragraph 23 of the Artistic Copyright Law.

Nonetheless, Minister President Kretschmer tweeted six days after the incident, "I made my opinion clear. It has not changed."

A few hours later, Saxony's Interior Ministry was forced to admit "that the citizen who verbally protested against recordings by a camera crew in Dresden last Thursday is an employee of the state criminal police." He took part in the demonstration as a private citizen and is currently on holiday, the ministry added.

The Interior Ministry refused to say which position the man occupies in the state criminal police. According to the latest reports, the man involved is Maik G, an auditor for economic crime who writes reports and also appears in court for the LKA.

The close collaboration between right-wing extremists, the police and the government could not be more obvious. An LKA employee participates in a right-wing extremist demonstration, provokes a camera crew, and then hands them over to his colleagues in the police, who illegally detain them. The police chief and minister president back the police, blame the camera

crew, and denounce them in the style of Pegida implicitly as “unserious.”

The incident triggered nationwide protest. The daily *Frankfurter Rundschau* remarked, “Sections of Saxony’s police actually seem to be so imbued with Pegida’s spirit that they are assisting the right-wing mob and enforce existing laws to the disadvantage of the constitutional order. The press is being prevented from performing its obligation to gather information, the threat posed by the right wing in the law, which reinterpret the law into a potential criminal offense.”

Federal Justice Minister Katarina Barley (Social Democrats, SPD) also spoke out. “The events in Saxony are extremely concerning and must be urgently and comprehensively investigated by the authorities in Saxony,” she said.

Barley should be careful what she wishes for. And this is not only due to the fact that the SPD is part of the government in Saxony, ensuring that the notoriously right-wing Christian Democrats (CDU) have a majority. More importantly, what is happening in Saxony is only a microcosm of a process that is well advanced at the national level.

The grand coalition of the CDU, Christian Social Union (CSU) and SPD has largely adopted the AfD’s policies, especially on the issue of refugees, and is going out of its way to praise the right-wing extremist party. The latest report by the domestic secret service, for which the federal government bears responsibility, gives the right-wing extremists a clean bill of health.

Neither the AfD, nor the open Nazi apologists in its ranks, nor Pegida are mentioned as targets in the report. By contrast, anyone who criticizes capitalism and advocates for a socialist program is immediately denounced as a “left-wing extremist” and stigmatized as being “opposed to the constitutional order.” The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) is identified as a “left-wing extremist party” and as an “object of observation.” The SGP has initiated a campaign against this.

The events in Dresden, together with the whitewash of the AfD in the secret service report, confirm that in the face of increasing social and international tensions, the ruling elite is resorting to the authoritarian methods of Bismarck and the Weimar Republic. At the time, it was a conspiracy of right-wing forces within the state apparatus that helped Hitler come to power so as to suppress all social and political opposition and destroy the workers’ movement.

Today, the grand coalition’s policies of social spending cuts, the strengthening of the state apparatus and militarism, which is supported by all of the parliamentary parties, is meeting with growing opposition. The grand coalition no longer has a majority according to the polls. Their readiness to retain democratic forms of rule is therefore rapidly evaporating.

The same applies to the so-called opposition parties. The daily *Tagesszeitung*, the mouthpiece of the Greens, expressed its understanding for Kretschmer’s behavior. The Greens are involved in a number of governments and even hold the

position of minister president in Baden-Württemberg.

Kretschmer “unconditionally defended his police force. That’s what minister presidents should do,” stated a TAZ comment on Thursday. “Because even if it was a right-wing extremist demonstrator who provoked the operation with his impertinence, and although three quarters of an hour is a long time to confirm someone’s identity, and also although this all ultimately led to the police preventing the journalists from doing their job without cause, one could easily confuse this with a somewhat unhelpful routine measure, perhaps even with a particularly firm enforcement of constitutional principles.”

The TAZ merely criticized the fact that Kretschmer could “not rely on his police.” The exposure of the Pegida provocateur as an LKA employee, the paper said with disapproval, would now “cost him dearly.”

The Left Party has also restrained itself from making any substantive comments. If the accusations prove true, Saxony’s police would have once again made themselves “accomplices of the Pegida supporters,” said Enrico Stange, a deputy in Saxony’s state parliament.

The Left Party is also up to its neck in the right-wing conspiracy involving the state apparatus. In every election program, the party calls for a major police build-up, and it implements this demand in the states where it participates in government. Christine Ostrowski, after a career in the East German state party SED and its successor organization, the PDS, and after leading the Left Party for 10 years in Dresden, now calls for a vote for the AfD.

The struggle against the right-wing conspiracy in the state apparatus requires a break from all of these parties and the building of an independent, internationalist and socialist party of the working class—the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei.



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