

“A whiff of 1933”

Sharp rise in far-right attacks in Germany

Marianne Arens, Ulrich Rippert
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Only a few weeks have passed since right-wing extremist thugs and neo-fascists organised an assault on foreigners in the German city of Chemnitz on 26 and 27 August. Ever since, leading politicians, led by Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU) and ex-president of the domestic secret service Hans-Georg Maassen, have sought to downplay the events.

Maassen denied that a racist attack had taken place. Seehofer declared immigration to be “the mother of all problems” and later added that if he were an ordinary citizen, he would have been on the streets in Chemnitz. When the interior minister made these comments it was already known that a dozen neo-Nazis had attacked the Jewish Schalom restaurant in Chemnitz with stones, glass bottles, and steel pipes, and insulted the owner with anti-Semitic slurs.

No disciplinary measures were taken against Maassen for his denial and he was not held to account. Instead, in negotiations involving all government parties, he was promoted. He will now advance the policies of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the Interior Ministry, where he will serve as state secretary for domestic security.

These developments have strengthened and encouraged the AfD and other far-right groups, who comprise a small and despised minority in Germany. The neo-Nazi thugs feel they are protected from criminal prosecution and emboldened to act ever more aggressively.

Victim support groups report that racist, anti-Semitic and far-right attacks are rising at an alarming rate. Neo-Nazi attacks and acts of violence occur on almost a daily basis.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published extracts from a chronology on Thursday noting that “a wave” of right-

wing violence is developing.

The newspaper reported the following attacks, among others:

- August 29, Wismar (Mecklenburg Pomerania): Three attackers broke a 20-year-old refugee's nose and beat his upper body with an iron chain.
- August 29, Sonderhausen (Thuringia): Four men, who are part of the right-wing scene according to police, severely injured a 33-year-old Eritrean.
- September 1, Essen (North Rhein-Westphalia): Two men beat a member of the local integration council and his companion, a refugee from Afghanistan, while insulting them with racist abuse.
- September 3, Rostock (Mecklenburg-Pomerania): A man attacked three students from Azerbaijan with a baton at a tram station.
- September 12, Chemnitz (Saxony): Several men beat a 41-year-old Tunisian.
- September 14, Munich (Bavaria): “I will kill all foreigners!” a 54-year-old shouted, as he sprayed a Nigerian immigrant with mace in the face.

One of the starkest examples of these attacks is the anti-Semitic death threats against Berlin-based blogger Schlecky Silberstein and his co-workers. The team of satirists has been the target of death threats on right-wing extremist websites after they filmed a parody of the far-right for public broadcaster SWR.

Silberstein, alias Christian M. Brandes, was originally an advertising writer and now works as an author, moderator and blogger. His production company filmed the satirical clip in Berlin-Lichtenberg on September 7 for the online comedy show *Bohemian Browser Ballet*.

The satirical video “People's Festival in Saxony” highlights in a pointed manner some of the characteristics of the far-right rampage in Chemnitz. The video shows Nazi goons seizing on the news of the

murder of a German citizen to initiate a right-wing rampage. A man wearing a black, red and gold hat, the colours of the German national flag, and shouting, “We are the people,” turns out to be a police officer. This is an obvious parody of the employee of Saxony's state criminal bureau who was fired after participating in a right-wing demonstration.

Participants in a so-called “funeral march” attack journalists and blacks. A neo-Nazi sells photos of his Nazi salute to the media for €10 apiece. And finally, swipes are taken at dishonest headlines in the *Bild* newspaper, pseudo-democrats and anti-Nazi “We are more” events sponsored by Coca-Cola and Flixbus.

In the clip, an information table for a political party that resembles the AfD is also featured. With the declaration, “Anyone can be a member here!”, a party official speaks to a bullnecked skinhead in khaki trousers. The AfD official wears the unmistakable white rose in his buttonhole, which the leaders of the AfD and Pegida wore during their so-called “silent marches” in Chemnitz.

With their video, Silberstein and his crew sought to take aim at the fascist threat, and for this they immediately found themselves in the crosshairs of the far-right.

The AfD Berlin-Lichtenberg responded quickly with its own film. In the video, they sought to portray the parody as a deliberate falsification, without acknowledging the obvious fact that it was a satire. As if they have never come across neo-Nazi marches, attacks on minorities and Nazi salutes, the AfD sought to portray all of this as the invention of evil left-wing journalists.

The AfD clip with the title “New fake video exposed” shows clips of the Silberstein film set, after which AfD official Karsten Woldeit, a member of the Berlin state parliament, declares that it is unbelievable what methods are being used to discredit the AfD. The video ends with Woldeit's demand, “The task now is to find out who made this video.”

A Facebook comment below the video states, “Those guys can surely be identified, they're clearly visible in the video.”

Shortly after the AfD posted this video, a video appeared showing AfD parliamentary deputy Frank-Christian Hansel and a cameraman standing in front of Silberstein's partner's front door and filming his address

sign. When nobody opens up, Hansel declares, “We'll be back.”

This clip, in which the full name, street address and house number can be clearly seen, was then spread by the AfD Berlin via its Facebook page.

A few hours later, the death threats began to arrive for Silberstein's partner. One states: “And it's Jews like you that are once again causing this agitation. You Jews are a conspiracy. You must be murdered!! ... One day, we will murder you.”

On the AfD's video channel, one person called for the filmmaker's private offices to be stormed.

“A whiff of 1933,” commented Silberstein on these events in his latest blog. “When politicians turn up at artists' homes to say 'We know where you live,' then that's where we are again, dear friends.”



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