

The murder of Walter Lübcke and the right-wing terror networks in the German state apparatus

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Two weeks after the murder of German regional politician Walter Lübcke, the district administrative president in Kassel, all evidence suggests that the CDU politician was shot by a neo-Nazi, who was known to the security services for 25 years, had a long history of criminal activity, and has connections with right-wing extremist terrorist groups.

On Saturday morning, 45-year-old Stephan E. was arrested, under the strong suspicion that he had maliciously killed Lübcke with a shot to the head during the night of June 1-2, 2019. Prior to the arrest, the public prosecutor in Kassel and the 50-person emergency commission established to investigate the murder, repeatedly claimed that they suspected someone with personal ties to Lübcke. But after traces of Stephan E.'s DNA were found at the crime scene, this version of events could no longer be sustained.

On Monday, the federal public prosecutor in Karlsruhe took over the case. The Karlsruhe office is responsible for investigating terrorist acts that endanger the internal or external security of the Federal Republic. It is obvious that the decision was also aimed at concealing the intimate ties between terrorist organisations, intelligence agencies and the state. Thus far, there was “nothing to indicate that the accused could have been involved in a right-wing terrorist organisation,” the federal public prosecutor declared in an initial statement.

In the five-year trial against the National Socialist Underground—a neo-Nazi terrorist group responsible for 10 murders, two bombings, and a series of bank robberies—the federal public prosecutor did everything possible to avoid examining the role of the security agencies in these events, even though it was the intelligence services’ actions that made the murders possible in the first place.

In the case of Stephan E., it has already been established that he has a long record of neo-Nazi criminality, has enjoyed close ties to right-wing extremist groups, and has been known to the authorities for many years.

At the age of just 20, in 1993, he attacked an asylum seeker accommodation centre in Hohenstein-Steckenroth with a pipe bomb. The bomb was concealed in a burning car, which residents of the centre were able to extinguish just before the

blast occurred. As a result, he was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment, in a juvenile prison, for attempted murder and attempting to cause a bomb explosion.

Prior to this, Stephan E. was known as a right-wing extremist. He had been convicted of grievous bodily harm and another case of arson, directed against foreigners, as well as violating firearms legislation. In November 1992, he attacked a man in Wiesbaden with a knife, causing life-threatening injuries.

In 2009, he was sentenced to seven months in jail for attacking a May Day demonstration in Dortmund, together with 300 autonomous nationalists. Nevertheless, in spite of his previous convictions, his sentence was suspended. According to *Spiegel Online*, there has been no public record of him engaging in any extremist activity since then, which could well mean that he has been recruited as an informant.

Stephan E. maintained close ties to right-wing extremist and terrorist networks. According to *Spiegel Online*, he was not only active in the Hesse NPD, a neo-Nazi party, and the autonomous nationalists, but also had relations with members of the militant neo-Nazi group, Combat 18.

Combat 18 emerged in Britain during the 1990s. The number 18 refers to the first and eighth letters of the alphabet, Adolf Hitler’s initials. In Germany, this was among the most important right-wing extremist groups at the turn of the century. It was close to the Network Blood and Honour, which played a crucial role in supporting the NSU.

Combat 18 was banned 17 years ago, but, in recent years, it has increased its activity without any intervention from the authorities. Combat 18 is a classic example of how right-wing terrorist groups can operate unhindered, with obvious support from the state.

When the Left Party tabled a question on this issue on 21 December 2016, the federal government replied that a network called Combat 18 had existed since 2013, with members from North-Rhein Westphalia, Hesse, Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, Rheinland-Palatinate and Lower Saxony. Nonetheless, neither the federal public prosecutor nor the federal criminal police launched any investigation into its structures or active members. No concrete evidence is known of investigations in

any of these states. Only the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Germany's federal domestic intelligence agency, has observed the group, suggesting that informants were, and remain, active in the group. *Spiegel Online* published several detailed articles on Combat 18, and the public broadcaster ARD's Panorama produced a film report last year that revealed Combat 18 members practicing shooting in the Czech Republic. The film also displayed some of its members during a trial for the illegal seizure of munitions. According to Panorama, 25 people from across Germany had transferred money into a bank account at the Kasseler Spaarkasse to support Combat 18. The account holder, known neo-Nazi Stanley R., has been convicted of extortion, grievous bodily harm, and theft.

But, again, nothing was done. Although Combat 18 was officially banned, the authorities continued to allow it to operate.

Although the evidence that has come to light thus far points to a right-wing extremist terrorist attack on Lübcke, the federal government is seeking to downplay the importance of these events. "The investigators now have someone under strong suspicion in custody, and we shouldn't burden their work with additional speculation," government spokesman Stefan Seibert insisted at a press conference. "A political assessment is not what we need right now."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel merely stated that she hoped "it will be quickly clarified who shot Mr. Lübcke and why." The opposition parties demanded an emergency sitting of the parliamentary interior committee. "Given the dramatic and unsettling developments in the Lübcke case" this was unavoidable, the Green Party's deputy parliamentary leader, Konstantin von Notz declared. The federal government had refused for too long "to openly present to parliament the structures and potential for violence within the right-wing extremist scene," Free Democrats' interior affairs expert Benjamin Strasser commented.

The reality is that the entire ruling class is responsible for the rise of the far-right and the reactionary political climate within which this murder could occur. The establishment parties have not only embraced the far-right AfD's policies and agitation against refugees. They have also ever more explicitly backed the right-wing extremist party. A neo-Nazi terrorist cell has even been formed in the army around the officer Franco A.

Significantly, a day prior to the arrest of Stephan E., *Der Spiegel* published an interview with former German President Joachim Gauck, who called for "more tolerance towards the right wing." This was an explicit reference to the AfD and the Pegida movement. Representatives of both these organisations had waged an unrestrained hate campaign against Lübcke, after he spoke out in defence of the rights of refugees at a public forum in 2015.

Among the agitators was the former CDU politician and president of the League of the Persecuted, Erica Steinbach, who

now leads the AfD's Desiderius Erasmus Foundation. Steinbach posted a series of criticisms of Lübcke earlier this year, and delayed deleting comments from others that threatened him with murder.

Steinbach's Facebook friends include the right-wing extremist Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski, who is notorious for his trivialisation of the Nazis and his agitation against refugees in the manner of the AfD. Despite this, the federal government leant its backing to the right-wing extremist professor at the end of May, publishing an official statement that declared all criticism of him to be "an attack on the free democratic order."

The same right-wing extremist spirit pervades the current Secret Service report, overseen by the governing grand coalition. While the AfD, along with its right-wing extremist supporters, is merely mentioned as the "victim" of alleged "left-wing extremism," all opposition to capitalism, nationalism, militarism, and imperialism is now being denounced as "left-wing extremist" and "unconstitutional."

Lübcke's murder must be taken as a serious warning. In the final analysis, it is the result of the systematic rehabilitation of fascist politics by the ruling class. Under conditions of the deepest capitalist crisis since the 1930s, mounting tensions between the major powers, and social opposition to social inequality and militarism, influential circles in government, the military, the intelligence agencies, and the universities are working systematically to strengthen the right-wing extremists.

The bloody consequences of these policies will not stop them. As occurred during the Weimar Republic, when the state apparatus was strengthened, following the murders of Centre Party politician Matthias Erzberger and liberal Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau by right-wing terror organisations, this situation will be exploited to intensify the crackdown against the left. The AfD's interior policy spokesman, Martin Hess, has already demanded that the parliamentary committee for internal affairs be used "to combat extremism, regardless of the form it takes."



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