

# Who was behind the murder of German politician Walter Lübcke?

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Evidence is mounting that a neo-Nazi network with close ties to the German state was behind the murder three weeks ago of Walter Lübcke, the district president of the Kassel region in the state of Hesse.

Following the arrest of neo-Nazi Stephan Ernst, who has a lengthy criminal record, as the prime suspect in the case, witnesses have suggested that additional individuals participated in the crime. A former German army soldier claimed to have heard a gunshot during the night of the murder, followed 20 minutes later by two cars driving “in an aggressive manner” through the local village. He identified one of the vehicles as a Volkswagen Caddy. Ernst’s wife has such a model licensed under her name, but alleges that the vehicle was exclusively used by Ernst.

If the witness’ statement is accurate, it means at least one additional perpetrator was directly involved in the murder. Walter Lübcke was executed on the terrace of his home with a shot to the head at close range just after midnight on June 2.

Further details about the ties of the suspect to the neo-Nazi milieu are also coming to light. They reach as far as the right-wing terrorist group National Socialist Underground (NSU) which carried out the ninth of its ten murders in Kassel in 2006, as well as associated organizations and the domestic intelligence agency.

Ernst has a lengthy criminal record. A total of seven rulings made by courts against him in Hesse, Schleswig-Holstein and Münster between 1993 and 2010 have been listed. The longest sentence imposed was in 1995, when Ernst was sentenced to six years in youth custody for attacking a facility for asylum seekers in Hohenstein-Steckenroth, Hesse, with a pipe bomb. Fines were also imposed for theft, bodily harm and insulting language. In addition, a number of charges, including arson, manslaughter, grievous bodily harm and robbery, were dropped due to a lack of evidence.

The last conviction against Ernst was handed down by the Dortmund District Court in 2010. It sentenced him to seven months in prison for attacking the May Day 2009 rally of the

German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) in Dortmund with stones and pieces of wood, together with hundreds of neo-Nazis. Despite his lengthy list of prior convictions, the court suspended the sentence.

During this period of time, Ernst was an active member of Kassel’s violent neo-Nazi milieu. NSU-Watch and the anti-fascist research platform Exif have published several photos showing Ernst in the company of well-known neo-Nazis.

During the early 2000s, he appeared at several meetings of the neo-Nazi NPD with Mike S., a member of the Oidoxie Streetfighting Crew. This group, named after a right-wing rock band, viewed itself as the German section of the extremist terrorist group Combat 18. It maintained close ties to the NSU, including providing it with practical support.

In 2006, Uwe Böhnhardt and Uwe Mundlos, two NSU members, allegedly attended a birthday party in Kassel for Stanley R., a leading local neo-Nazi. Ernst, who was close to R., probably met both of them personally at the event. Shortly thereafter, the NSU murdered its ninth victim, Halet Yozgat, in an internet cafe in Kassel.

As the murder took place, Andreas Temme, an employee of the Hesse state intelligence agency who was nicknamed “Little Adolf,” was also at the cafe. However, he claims not to have witnessed anything untoward, a claim which numerous experts consider to be highly unlikely. Temme’s real role remains unclear to this day. Although Temme appeared at the NSU trial held in Munich and before the parliamentary investigatory commissions, former Hesse Interior Minister and current Minister President Volker Bouffier, a personal friend of Lübcke, refused to give Temme unrestricted authorization to testify.

After his dubious role in the Yozgat case, Temme, who was responsible for the intelligence agency’s informants in right-wing groups, changed jobs. He has since worked in the district presidium in Kassel, the institution led by Lübcke—a mere coincidence?

Lübcke’s alleged murderer, Ernst, was at least indirectly connected to Temme. He knew the neo-Nazi and intelligence agency informant Benjamin Gärtner, who spoke to Temme

by telephone shortly prior to Yozgat's murder. During testimony to the NSU investigatory commission in the Hesse state parliament in February 2016, Gärtner confirmed that he knew Ernst as "NPD Stephan."

At the time, the commission had possession of a secret dossier on Ernst. The dossier subsequently disappeared. The intelligence agency claims that it has not been deleted, but that access to it has merely been blocked because Ernst had not faced any charges for ten years. It remains unclear if this is in fact the case.

The claim that Ernst did not publicly appear as a right-wing extremist over the past ten years lacks all credibility. The much more relevant question is whether he reached an agreement with the intelligence agency and was therefore left undisturbed.

He certainly remained an active right-wing extremist. In 2016, he donated €150 to the election campaign of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Thuringia, an especially militant section of the party. Under the pseudonym "Game Over," he agitated on YouTube against foreigners and the government. He warned in 2018, "Either this government resigns shortly or there will be deaths." The police found weapons during a search of his home.

It has been assumed thus far that Walter Lübcke was murdered due to his pro-refugee stance. In 2015, he opposed members of the far-right Pegida movement at a public meeting on the question of providing accommodation for refugees, for which he was responsible as district president. This led to the eruption of a campaign of death threats online, which prompted the police to provide Lübcke with personal protection for a period of time. For no apparent reason, this campaign was revived earlier this year.

However, given the professional way in which the murder was carried out and the suspect's close ties to right-wing extremist networks connected with the state security apparatus, other motives for the killing cannot be excluded. Could it be that Lübcke knew too much, and had become an obstacle to the far-right cliques?

It is now beyond question that violent right-wing extremist criminals can act largely unhindered by the state, while maintaining close relations with relevant networks within the state apparatus.

The federal domestic intelligence agency counted 24,000 neo-Nazis in Germany in 2017, of which 12,700 were considered to be prepared to commit acts of violence. These figures do not even include the AfD, Pegida and its far-right associates, because these organisations are not deemed to be right-wing extremist by the intelligence agency. The Federal Criminal Police Agency registered 838 cases of injuries caused by right-wing violence last year. Despite this, the intelligence agency categorised just 38 of the 12,700 neo-

Nazis prepared to commit violence as threats.

Victims of right-wing extremist violence and threats repeatedly note that they receive no support from the police. Journalists and local and state politicians have received thousands of right-wing threats by email, without the police doing anything about them. Cologne mayoral candidate Henriette Reker and the mayor of Altena, Andreas Hollstein, only narrowly survived right-wing extremist attacks. Others, like the Berlin Left Party politician Philipp Wohlfeil, suffered severe injuries at the hands of right-wing extremist thugs and are on blacklists maintained by the far right.

Following the exposure of right-wing extremist army officer Franco A., who fraudulently registered as a refugee, investigations into the so-called "prepper scene," and the threatening letters sent to the lawyer Seda Ba?ay- Y?id?z, numerous right-wing extremist networks in the army and police have come to light. But hardly any consequences have followed.

Although detailed information about a nationwide "prepper" network, which hoarded weapons and maintained kill lists of left-wing opponents, was revealed during a series of police raids in Mecklenburg-Pomerania two years ago, the group's members remained secret and some were even allowed to continue working as police officers.

Only recently, on June 12, four elite police officers were arrested. They had managed to misdirect and hoard munitions, including 10,000 bullets.

Was it a mere coincidence that those arrests occurred just ten days after Lübcke's murder, and three days prior to the arrest of the neo-Nazi suspect? Or did sections of the state apparatus get cold feet?



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