

The Lübcke murder and the return of the “Nazi problem” in Germany

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Nearly 75 years after the collapse of Hitler’s Third Reich, the assassination of German politician Walter Lübcke (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) on June 2 by a right-wing terrorist has exposed the long-concealed filthy truth that Germany once again has a very real Nazi problem.

For several weeks, Lübcke’s murder was downplayed by the media and virtually ignored by the political elite. But smouldering public outrage and, even more, the fear of politicians that they may be targeted by right-wing terrorists, have led to high-level admissions that neo-Nazi activity is now a major political danger in Germany.

The cover of *Der Spiegel*, Germany’s mass circulation weekly news magazine, has a photo of the assassin, Stephan Ernst, and the headline: “The Brown Sleepers: Father, Neighbour, Killer? The New Danger from the Right.”

Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU), declared in Dortmund on Saturday that the murder of Lübcke was “an urgent call ... to examine all areas for possible signs of right-wing extremist tendencies and networks.” Warning of “a total loss of credibility,” Merkel said that the state is “called upon to act at all levels, and the German government takes this responsibility very, very seriously.”

Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU), who had claimed only a few days earlier that there was no evidence of the involvement of right-wing extremist terrorist groups in the Lübcke murder, admitted that right-wing extremism has become “a serious danger.” Seehofer therefore intends to “give the constitutional state more bite” and “exert all efforts to increase security.”

Foreign Minister Heiko Maas acknowledged in a comment for the mass circulation *Bild* newspaper, “Germany has a terrorism problem. We have more than 12,000 right-wing extremists committed to carrying out acts of violence in our country. 450 have been able to go undercover, even though outstanding arrest warrants for them exist.” He concluded with a call to “combat the beginnings, together, every day, and everywhere.”

All these belated statements of shock and concern reek of hypocrisy and deceit. The right-wing terrorist network is a

Frankenstein monster brought into existence by the police and intelligence agencies. It is protected and encouraged by the main political parties. Together with the media and an influential layer of extreme right-wing academics, they have created a political and intellectual environment that sanctions and encourages the resurgence of fascism.

They have promoted the racist *Alternative für Deutschland*, whose principal leader recently trivialized the Nazi atrocities as insignificant “bird poop” that should not detract from a thousand years of “glorious” German history. According to media reports, the accused assassin of Lübcke, Ernst, donated 150 Euros to the AfD in 2016. He sent the money with the message: “Election Campaign Donation 2016: GOD BLESS YOU.”

The Grand Coalition has played the central role in building up the political authority of the AfD. The decision of the CDU/CSU and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), in the aftermath of the last national election in 2017, to continue their unpopular coalition government made the AfD the leader of the official parliamentary opposition, even though it received only 12.6 percent of the vote.

The CDU and the SPD have made pacts with the AfD, affording it ever-greater influence in the state apparatus, the security forces and in the federal and state parliaments. At the same time, both parties have largely adopted the AfD’s policies.

Seehofer and Maas exemplify the coalition’s cultivation of neo-fascist elements. In the aftermath of last summer’s fascistic anti-immigrant protests in Chemnitz, Seehofer proclaimed that he would have joined the march if he was not a government minister. He insisted that “the problem of immigration is the mother of all problems in this country.”

Maas, a Social Democrat who incessantly demands an aggressive foreign policy backed by military force, has directed his vitriol against the widespread left-wing and anti-war sympathies of large sections of the German population, especially of the student and working-class youth.

At the centre of this foul political process was a carefully orchestrated campaign to relativize and legitimize the crimes

of the Third Reich by claiming that Hitler's policies were an understandable, though *perhaps* excessive, response to the greater evil of Bolshevism. The reactionary role played by the German government and media is made particularly clear in the case of Professor Jörg Baberowski, the prominent Hitler apologist who heads the politically connected Department of East European Studies at Berlin's prestigious Humboldt University.

Baberowski is despised by students for his vicious diatribes against immigrants and his cynical trivialization of Nazi crimes. "Hitler was not vicious," he told *Der Spiegel* in 2014. "He did not like to hear of the extermination of the Jews at his table." Despite—or rather, because of—this, Baberowski has been lionized in the media and protected by his many friends in the state apparatus. Just days before Lübcke's murder, the German government backed the right-wing extremist professor in an official statement, declaring that any criticism of Baberowski was an attack on "the free democratic social order."

Now Baberowski's Facebook friend, Erica Steinbach, has been publicly denounced as one of the spiritual authors of the murder of Lübcke. Earlier this year, Steinbach published a series of attacks on Lübcke for his defence of the acceptance of refugees in October 2015. Baberowski's friend refused for some time to delete death threats against Lübcke posted in the comments section of her page.

Lübcke's murder has fully confirmed the warnings of a fascist resurgence made by the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* (SGP) and the *World Socialist Web Site*. We explained the political implications of both Baberowski's legitimization of Hitler's crimes and then President Joachim Gauck's announcement of the "end of military restraint" at the 2014 Munich Security Conference.

The SGP warned, "The propaganda of the post-war era—that Germany had learnt from the terrible crimes of the Nazis, had 'arrived at the West,' had embraced a peaceful foreign policy, and had developed into a stable democracy—is exposed as lies. German imperialism is once again showing its real colours as it emerged historically, with all of its aggressiveness at home and abroad."

The danger posed by the fascist resurgence is real. But there are profound differences between the political situation that existed in the 1930s and today. While Hitler was able to mobilize millions of disoriented and ruined small businessmen and poverty-stricken peasants under his banner, fascism today is not a mass movement. It is despised by the overwhelming majority. Despite all the efforts by the German ruling class to whitewash the historic crimes of German imperialism, the broad mass of the population has not forgotten the horrors of the 1930s and 1940s. A recent poll shows that 70 percent of the German population

opposes any government participation of the AfD. Only 9 percent would back a coalition government including the AfD.

The strength of the AfD and the fascist killers who orbit around it is to a very great extent dependent on its support in the state apparatus, especially the police and intelligence agencies. Moreover, it can count on the sympathy, and even active encouragement, of the CDU/CSU and SPD. Gauck, who is supported by all the established parties, called, in a recent *Spiegel* interview published *after* the killing of Lübcke, for a "greater tolerance towards the right."

A current CDU discussion paper in the state of Saxony-Anhalt openly calls for the formation of a coalition government with the AfD based on an explicitly right-wing extremist program. The paper argued that it is necessary "to once again unite the social with the national. Security from social decline with security from criminality. The desire for a home and national identity must be clearly opposed to all strands of multiculturalism in left-wing parties and groups."

As occurred in the Weimar Republic in the 1920s, following the murders of Centre Party politician Matthias Erzberger and liberal Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau by right-wing extremists, the state apparatus, which has been infiltrated by the far-right, will be utilized to intensify the crackdown against the left.

The Grand Coalition's latest report of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution [*Verfassungsschutz*] confirms that for the bourgeoisie, "enemies of democracy" are to be found not on the right, but on the political left. The AfD and its right-wing extremist supporters are referred to as the "victims" of alleged "left-wing extremism." But opposition to capitalism, nationalism, militarism and imperialism is denounced as "left-wing extremist" and "unconstitutional."

The SGP has been placed on the government's "watch list" on the grounds that it denounces the AfD, opposes the remilitarization of Germany, and calls for a socialist society.

The SGP is not intimidated and will not be deterred by this political threat. The SGP is taking legal action against the *Verfassungsschutz*. It is appealing to the only social force that can defeat the right-wing political conspiracy: the German, European and international working class.



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