

Thousands protest in Germany against right-wing violence following fascist Yom Kippur attack

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14 October 2019

Last Wednesday's attack in Halle, in which a heavily armed fascist and anti-Semite sought to enter a synagogue in order to commit mass murder on the Yom Kippur holiday, has evoked horror and a wave of solidarity protests against right-wing violence. The attacker, 27-year-old Stephan Balliet, was unable to gain entry to the synagogue, where some 50 worshippers were gathered on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. He proceeded to fatally shoot two people and wound several others in the immediate vicinity.

On Friday, thousands of people demonstrated against fascism and right-wing terrorism in cities across Germany. Masses of flowers were placed in front of synagogues accompanied by messages reading "Fight the beginnings" and "Together against the Right." Passers-by stopped in groups in front of mosques, and in Halle, hundreds gathered to form a human chain around the synagogue.

The anti-racist initiative #unteilbar (#indivisible) called for a protest rally at August Bebel Square in Berlin-Mitte on Sunday. Last year the group organized a demonstration against xenophobia, the racist and anti-Semitic agitation of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), and the grand coalition government's right-wing policies, in which nearly a quarter-million people participated.

The appeal for the demonstration states, "Right-wing terror threatens our society!" It points out that the Halle assassin was not a lone offender. His terrorist attack was linked to "established militant Nazi structures, the NSU [National Socialist Underground] network and right-wing networks in the security agencies." Added to this was the police's "lack of willingness to investigate" and "a non-stop trivialization of the right-wing danger" in political circles and the media.

The massive expression of solidarity with the Jewish population and opposition to the far-right demonstrates the falsity of claims that the rise of the AfD and growth of right-wing terrorism reflect a rightward shift within the general public. The opposite is taking place. In the face of growing

left-wing sentiment and opposition to military rearmament, restrictions on democratic rights and the strengthening of the police powers of the state, right-wing and neo-fascist cliques are being formed within the state apparatus. The cadres of the AfD come from the establishment parties and are supported and celebrated by "mainstream" politicians and media.

The Halle assassin, Stephan Balliet, was shaped by this milieu. On Friday, he filed a confession before an investigating judge in Karlsruhe in which he admits to racist and anti-Semitic motives in his deadly attack. According to the Federal Prosecutor's Office, he is charged with two counts of murder and nine counts of attempted murder.

He should have been charged with over 50 counts of attempted murder. Balliet attempted to carry out a massacre in the Halle synagogue and kill as many Jews as possible. When he failed to do this, he shot a passer-by and shortly thereafter a construction worker at a kebab kiosk. He also seriously injured other passers-by.

The authorities have repeatedly claimed that Balliet was unknown to them and that he acted as a lone offender. However, Balliet was active on the internet, participating in worldwide, networked right-wing terrorist circles. During his interrogation, he reportedly testified that an "unknown person" with whom he had communicated on the internet had transferred money to him.

Balliet filmed the entire course of his cold-blooded murders and attempted murders, streaming everything on the gaming platform Twitch. Although his video has been deleted on Twitch, right-wing chat groups have been able to redistribute it. In the footage, Balliet addresses a global right-wing extremist audience to which he speaks in English.

He was clearly taking his lead from mass murderers such as Brenton Tarrant in New Zealand and Anders Breivik in Norway. In 2011, Breivik murdered several dozen young people and children belonging to the Norwegian Workers' Youth. Tarrant shot and killed 50 people at two mosques in

Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, 2019, injuring dozens more, and streamed the entire bloody assault live. Like these two, Balliet wrote a manifesto, which he posted on the internet. In it he states the following goals: “To kill Jews... to burn down a synagogue and a mosque, to kill a communist, to behead people ...” He had also in mind targeting an Antifa centre.

Some of Balliet’s equipment (helmet, bullet-proof vest) apparently came from German Army (Bundeswehr) stockpiles and the police. It is quite possible that Balliet made his first contact with the far-right scene in the Bundeswehr. As is now known, in 2010 and 2011, shortly before the abolition of conscription, he underwent six months’ military service at the Panzergrenadierbataillon 401 in Mecklenburg-Pomerania, where he acquired training in weapons and shooting.

While hundreds of thousands have reacted with shock and spontaneous solidarity with the victims, politicians of all stripes have indulged in boundless hypocrisy. Their protestations of concern are meant to distract from their own responsibility for what has happened.

The central political responsibility of the German government for this act of murder is undeniable. For years, the grand coalition government of Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) has been implementing the xenophobic policies of the AfD, from which it is now trying to dissociate itself. The government has systematically built up the capacity of the Bundeswehr for the next major war, providing the tens of billions of euros it requires by squeezing them out of the working class through ever more brutal austerity policies. In order to contain social opposition and divide the working class it has promoted nationalism and xenophobia, including the witch-hunting of Muslims.

On the eve of the Halle attack, the federal interior ministry, headed by Horst Seehofer (CSU), ordered the deportation of 44 men to war-torn Afghanistan. It was the 28th such charter flight to land in Kabul. Seehofer has also set up the notorious “anchor centres,” where refugees who have committed no crime are detained.

Decades of right-wing politics have led to the spread of a dangerous far-right network within the police, Bundeswehr and Secret Service. The AfD is the political figurehead of this “state within the state,” which, to an increasing extent, sets the political tone.

Right-wing war propaganda is being promoted at universities. Those who criticize such racism and war-mongering are persecuted and harassed by the government. The Verfassungsschutz (Secret Service) has placed the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP—Socialist Equality Party) under surveillance and branded it a “left-wing

extremist” organization on the explicit grounds that the SGP opposes capitalism, nationalism and the AfD and fights for a socialist programme against fascism and war.

The motives of the Halle assassin are reminiscent of the “Nordkreuz” group, which is infamous for its special cruelty. The group has hoarded weapons, ammunition and supplies and trained in shooting in order to kill political opponents, including refugee aid workers and “left-wing” politicians. Its ranks include policemen, intelligence agents and Bundeswehr soldiers. The penetration of right-wing extremist organizations deep within the state became clear with the recent fascist murder of Kassel’s regional president, Walter Lübcke. His murderer had been known to the Hesse state intelligence service for years.

All this is so obvious that journalists who interviewed Seehofer on television Friday evening asked him why his government had retained Hans-Georg Maassen for five years as head of the Verfassungsschutz despite his close links to the AfD. They asked if that meant the German state was “blind in the right eye.”

Seehofer once again defended Maassen. “I’ve never seen him as radical right-winger,” said the interior minister, downplaying the right-wing network within the state: “The number of cases is marginal. We are acting consistently there.”

In the same program, Seehofer acknowledged that some 12,000 violent right-wing extremists circulated freely in Germany, and that they were characterized by “a high degree of affinity for weapons and a high degree of readiness to use violence.”

His conclusion was that he needed “a few hundred extra people” in the Federal Criminal Office (BKA) and the Verfassungsschutz, and he argued for more stringent government control over social media such as Facebook. He justified the censorship of social media, saying, “We have to learn in Germany that the new media spreads hatred.”

The German government is reacting to the Halle attack in familiar fashion—building up the apparatus of an authoritarian police state and shielding far-right extremists.



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