

New Year's Eve in Leipzig: German media and police spread false reports about left-wing violence

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The year 2020 began in Germany with a massive campaign against alleged “leftist terrorism.”

The police, leading politicians and the media have declared that clashes between police officers and young people celebrating the New Year in the suburb of Connewitzer Kreuz in Leipzig amounted to politically motivated attempts to commit murder and are pushing false reports to launch a massive political campaign aimed at raising the spectre of left-wing extremism.

There were “organised attacks resulting in the severest injuries to people,” Leipzig police chief Torsten Schultze declared.

The German interior minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU) agreed: “This deed demonstrates that inhuman violence also emanates from left-wing extremists.” The Saxony state criminal office (LKA) indicated it was undertaking investigations into “attempted murder.”

The mayor of Leipzig, Burkhard Jung (SPD), ranted about a “tough, small criminal and violent network” and told the police to “quickly arrest these brutal violent offenders.” The former German interior minister, Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU), spoke of the “ugly face of leftist terrorism.”

Anyone who watched the New Year's news programs or visited the websites of the major newspapers would be forced to conclude that dangerous terrorist attacks had taken place in Leipzig on New Year's Eve.

Subsequently dozens of newspapers sought to outdo one another with headlines such as “Brutal street battle in Leipzig: Chaotic anarchists seek to kill police officers” (*Tag 24*), “Rituals of Violence,” “An orgy of violence” (*Kölnische Rundschau*), “Leipzig police

officer nearly has his ear blown off” (*Focus*), “Attempted murder linked to Connewitz riots” (*Leipziger Volkszeitung*) and “Police warn against new Red Army Terror faction” (*Bild*).

The very next day it became clear that these reports had no factual basis and were based exclusively on police reports that turned out to be both false and contradictory. They were evidently circulated by right-wing elements inside the police force and then uncritically promoted by the media. Injuries to a few police officers have been blown out of proportion to create a climate of intimidation and boost the powers of the police and state authorities.

The military-style police operation in Connewitz and the aggressive response indicate that the police were intent on escalation from the start. Eyewitnesses reported that a police helicopter commenced circling the neighbourhood at noon on December 31. According to local residents, the police massively increased their presence in the area and carried out random body checks in the evening.

After about one thousand people gathered at Connewitzer Kreuz to celebrate New Year's Eve, groups of police reportedly stormed into the celebrating crowd, harassing and injuring a number of innocent people. The assembled crowd responded by throwing fireworks and bottles at the police.

The Leipzig police immediately put out a press release claiming that its officers had been “attacked massively with stones, bottles and fireworks at around 12:15 a.m.” A “group of violent criminals” allegedly tried to “push a burning shopping cart into the middle of a riot police unit.” One policeman struck by a firework was so badly injured that “he lost

consciousness and had to be operated on in hospital.”

The Saxon State Criminal Police Office (LKA) threw further fuel onto the fire the following day, declaring that investigations into “attempted manslaughter” had now been turned into an investigation into “attempted murder.”

LKA spokesman Tom Bernhardt said last Wednesday that the specific circumstances and injuries sustained by one police officer had prompted the public prosecutor to turn the investigation into a more serious offence, meaning that it was no longer considered a question of injuries from projectiles, but of a deliberate attack. The LKA later said that three police officers were attacked by 20 to 30 people while trying to arrest a suspect. Their helmets were torn off and a 38-year-old police officer sustained serious injuries.

Most of the statements by the police and the LKA have now been exposed as misrepresentations or crass exaggerations. The *taz* newspaper reported on Thursday that, according to the relevant hospital, there was never an emergency operation, as the Leipzig police had claimed. Instead treatment was carried out to the police officer’s ear under local anesthetic. There was never any “danger to life or impending loss of hearing.” On Friday police also had to admit that there was never any danger to life and that no emergency surgery had taken place.

According to the *taz*, the burning shopping cart never posed a danger to the police. Based on eyewitness reports and numerous video and photo recordings, the newspaper concluded that the cart had come to a halt about 30 meters in front of the police. A violent conflict only then resulted when the police aggressively stormed the crowd.

Eyewitnesses report that one police officer was carried away by his colleagues following the police offensive. He still had his helmet on his head and there is no reliable evidence to back up the version of events given by the LKA. It is also unclear whether assaults on police officers during the night were carried out by politically disorientated anarchists, drunken party goers, or police provocateurs.

It is significant that even after the exposure of the police lies, leading politicians continued to attack those who dared to criticise the police and their account of events. Leading the pack was the former Social Democratic Party (SPD) chairman and foreign minister

Sigmar Gabriel who expressed his displeasure with “smart-alecks from afar” who criticise the police’s strategy, tweeting: “Why should the police have to justify themselves instead of the thugs?” The leader of the neoliberal Free Democratic Party, Christian Lindner, took offence at the limited criticism of police tactics by SPD chairperson Saskia Esken. Lindner explained: “Those who risk their necks for us deserve our backing.”

That is the type of reasoning associated with a police state. First, the lies of the police are adopted by a majority of the media without questions being asked, and then anyone who exposes these lies and seeks clarification is vilified. To enforce its policies of glaring social inequality and militarism the ruling elite is increasingly turning towards authoritarian and fascist methods to suppress mass opposition. This is behind the attack on basic constitutional principles observed on New Year’s Eve.

The aim of the latest campaign surrounding the events in Leipzig is to intimidate anyone who stands in the way of the far right. Following two major terrorist attacks last year carried out by far right-wing networks—the murder of the Christian Democratic Union politician Walter Lübcke and an anti-Semitic attack in the city of Halle—the networks involved remain intact.

A similar offensive by the police and media took place in 2017 following protests against the G20 summit in Hamburg. Since then, a systematic campaign has been carried out to defame as “left-wing extremist” anyone who opposes the advance of the extreme right and criticises capitalism.

In 2018, the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* (SGP) was included in the German domestic intelligence agency’s report for the first time and designated as “left-wing extremist,” although even the agency itself acknowledged that the party had always used legal and non-violent means to pursue its aims. The SGP was defamed and is being persecuted solely due to its socialist politics.



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