Germany: Racist “family tree research” and police state measures in Stuttgart

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The aggressive police state campaign following the so-called night of violence in Stuttgart is taking on increasingly blatant racist features. Over the weekend, it became known that the Stuttgart police are conducting so-called “family tree research.” According to the minutes of last Thursday’s meeting of the city council, Stuttgart’s police chief Franz Lutz stated that “nationwide searches” would be conducted at registry offices “to determine the migration background (of individual suspects).”

The measure is so obviously in the tradition of the Nazis, who persecuted people based on their origin or “race”, that even parts of the police feel compelled to condemn the action. “There is no connection between ethnicity, origin or nationality and crime”, explained criminologist Thomas Müller of the PolizeiGrün professional association. “What the police in Stuttgart wants to investigate is racism in action and is reprehensible given Germany’s past.”

Although the “family tree research” by the Stuttgart police has caused an outcry among the population, it is being aggressively defended by the coalition state government of the Greens and the Christian Democrats (CDU). Baden-Württemberg’s Interior Minister Thomas Strobl (CDU) said, “Establishing living and family circumstances is part of police investigations, this is a matter of course in criminal proceedings.” He went on to say that for reasons of crime prevention, “in individual cases, the nationality of the parents of suspects is determined by inquiries at the registry office to clarify whether there is a migration background.”

Representatives of the Greens made similar provocative statements. “I cannot detect any misconduct on the part of the police,” said Winfried Kretschmann, the Green state premier of Baden-Württemberg, on Tuesday. He said that the wrongly conveyed term “family tree research,” which the police allegedly never used, had created a “completely poisoned debate.”

Stuttgart’s Mayor Fritz Kuhn (Greens) also defended the racist approach of the police in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. “Of course, the desire to know as much as possible: Where do they come from, where do they live, how old are they? We must understand: What drove these young men to do this?” He advises “everyone to keep their heads down.” You cannot “say one day, we’re behind the police and the next day, we’re insulting them again. The police must now investigate, and we must have the right information so that we can do the prevention work that we are focusing on.”

By “prevention work,” Kuhn and the Greens do not mean social programmes, but the stigmatisation and persecution of allegedly “criminal migrants” and young people. For weeks, their leaders have been agitating in the style of the extreme-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and calling for law and order. The events of the night from June 20 to 21 serve as a pretext for them when clashes between youths and the police occurred in downtown Stuttgart after a 17-year-old was checked for drugs.

The clashes clearly have social and political causes. In an interview with SWR radio, Stuttgart social worker Veronika Laengrich described the problems facing many young people. “Our young people probably experience structural discrimination from a very early age. Be it at school, be it in contact with police officers, be it in the job centre,” she said. The reaction of the young people in June were not surprising to her. “Such checks sometimes happen here five times a day,” according to Laengrich. “And at some point, things probably reach their limit, where it explodes.”

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Although the vast majority of the youths under investigation are from Stuttgart and have German passports,leadingpoliticians—especiallytheGreens—are engaged in xenophobic smear campaigns.

On 21 June, the mayor of Tübingen, Boris Palmer, who is notorious for his racist outbursts, shared a picture from the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* on his Facebook page showing young people in downtown Stuttgart. He commented, “Almost all of them have an appearance that would be described in the police report as ‘dark-skinned’ or ‘southern.’ I can hardly discover any ‘white men.’ In the videos of the night of the riot, almost all the perpetrators have similar appearances to most of the men in this photo.”

The racist “family tree research” by the Stuttgart police also bears the signature of the Greens. According to media reports, Kretschmann had already called for “a more accurate picture of those involved in the night of chaos” at the end of June. More precise information was needed, he said. “If these are certain milieus that now come from migrant communities or something—these are important things, you can do something with them.”

The racist campaign goes hand in hand with the systematic stepping up of police state powers. “In the short term, we will strengthen police forces at the weekend, in the medium term, the security partnership I have offered the city of Stuttgart will have an effect, and thirdly, we need stricter penalties for this massively violent mob,” threatened Interior Minister Strobl (CDU) as early as 26 June.

Since then, the measures announced have been put into practice. Hundreds of additional police officers are being deployed, especially on weekends. Officers in full protective gear, mounted police and plain-clothed officers characterize the cityscape.

On 2 July, the security partnership between the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg and the city of Stuttgart announced by Strobl was adopted. The massive police presence is now the new normal, with the expansion of video surveillance in the city centre as well as increased controls on Stuttgart’s arrival and departure routes.

On the first weekend in July, a police helicopter circled over Stuttgart city centre, which police spokesman Jens Lauer justified saying, “This gave us a better overview of the situation.” In addition, the dark corners of Lake Eckensee and the Upper Schlossgarten were illuminated by the Technical Relief Agency.

Last weekend, the police again brutally attacked groups of youths. In the early hours of 12 July, they cleared the Eckensee at around 12:30 am, leading to further arrests. The police justified their action by saying that “sustained alcohol consumption” in the castle garden and on the castle square had been prohibited since May 2020.

The comprehensive arming and mobilization of the police is not limited to Stuttgart and Baden-Württemberg but is being pushed forward nationwide. Police laws are being tightened up everywhere and the security apparatus is being expanded to control the emerging social struggles, which are being further intensified by the coronavirus crisis and its consequences. In this way, the authorities seek to suppress the growing resistance against the intensified exploitation of workers and the politics of militarism.

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