

Trial of Halle synagogue shooter begins in Germany

Peter Schwarz
24 July 2020

On Tuesday, the trial of Stephan Balliet, who committed a terrorist attack on the synagogue in Halle on 9 October last year, began in the Magdeburg Regional Court. The 28-year-old is accused of double murder, 68 counts of attempted murder, predatory extortion, dangerous bodily harm and sedition.

Balliet, heavily armed and in battle dress, appeared in front of the synagogue on Yom Kippur, the highest Jewish holiday, where more than sixty members of the Jewish community had gathered. He was planning a massacre, such as Brenton Tarrant had committed in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.

When the door lock withstood his shots and he was unable to enter the synagogue, he shot a random passer-by. He then went to a kebab restaurant where he killed a twenty-year-old painter whom he thought was a southern European. Only the rifle jamming prevented further murders.

On the run, Balliet engaged in a skirmish with police officers and shot a couple to steal their car. The two survived. He was arrested some time later after he had rammed a truck sixty kilometres from Halle.

Balliet fully admitted his crimes in court and used the courtroom, in which many of his victims sat as joint plaintiffs, to spread his anti-Semitic and racist smears.

After the refugee crisis in 2015, he said he had decided “to do nothing more for this society”, which was replacing him “with Muslims and negroes”. He described refugees as “conquerors from the Muslim cultural sphere”, the Jews as “organizers” of the influx of refugees. Asked by the presiding judge why he had attacked not a mosque but a synagogue, he replied, “It is a difference to fight symptom or cause.”

Balliet expressed regret that he had only killed two people who were neither Jews nor Muslims nor foreigners. They were not his “enemies”, he said. On the other hand, it was annoying that his plan had not worked

out, he said. As a result, he sees himself as a “failure” who has “made himself globally ridiculous”. When the video was shown in the courtroom on the second day of the trial, in which Balliet had broadcast his actions live via a helmet camera, he smiled again and again.

Although the presiding judge, Ursula Mertens, warned the defendant that she would exclude him from the trial if he continued to insult people, she has, so far, not made good on her threat.

Meanwhile, the media are trying to portray Balliet as a lone perpetrator. According to what has become known about him since the attack and in the courtroom, he served in the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) for six months; he then began studying chemistry, later dropping out. Since then, he was unemployed and lived a secluded life in his mother’s household. He is said to have had neither friends nor personal contacts and to have radicalised himself exclusively through relevant forums on the Internet, where he then announced and streamed his own crime.

In the 121-page indictment, there is no reference to confidants or accomplices—which does not necessarily mean that they did not exist. In the trial of the neo-Nazi terrorist organisation National Socialist Underground (NSU), which lasted five years in Munich, the public prosecutor’s office and the court had carefully excluded any references to possible backers. Although the members of the NSU had close connections to other neo-Nazis, they insisted that the organisation consisted of only three individual perpetrators. In this way, they tried to cover up the numerous undercover Confidential Informants who had been active in the environment of the NSU on behalf of the Verfassungsschutz (secret service) and police.

The thesis of a single perpetrator is completely absurd when one considers the social background against which the most dangerous anti-Semitic attack since the liberation of the concentration camps 75 years ago took place. Even

if Balliet was indeed a lone wolf, such a barbaric plan can only mature into a crime in an appropriate social climate.

The systematic trivialisation of Nazi crimes; the cover-up and promotion of far-right terrorist networks in the Bundeswehr, the police and the secret service; the prominent position accorded to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the political arena and the media—all these factors contributed to the attack in Halle.

It is worth remembering the case of the right-wing extremist historian Jörg Baberowski, who had told leading newsweekly *Der Spiegel* that Hitler he was “not cruel” and had defended the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte. When the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its youth organization IYSSE criticized him for this, the entire academic establishment stood behind Baberowski. The media conducted a smear campaign against “Trotskyist bullying”. Finally, the SGP was included in the annual report by the secret service as a “left-wing extremist organisation”. A statement by the interior ministry justified this on the grounds that “fighting for a democratic, egalitarian, socialist society” and agitation against imperialism and militarism were unconstitutional.

The AfD, whose leader Alexander Gauland has described Nazi crimes as just so much “bird shit” in a thousand years of glorious German history, is the leader of the official opposition in the Bundestag (federal parliament). The other parties have entrusted it with the chairmanship of several important committees. When prominent AfD members led a racist march in Chemnitz in summer 2018, together with militant neo-Nazis, the then head of the secret service, Hans-Georg Maassen, Saxony state Premier Michael Kretschmer, and federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, defended the racist mob.

Only after a public outcry was Maassen retired early. Since then, the state-paid pensioner, who is still a member of the governing Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the so-called Union of Values, has appeared on the Internet as a celebrated speaker before AfD supporters and as a right-wing agitator.

Details of the right-wing terrorist “Hannibal” network—consisting of elite KSK soldiers, special police officers, judges, lawyers and secret service officers—which hoards weapons, maintains lists of enemies and prepares for a coup on “Day X”, have long been known without any consequences. Every now and then, someone gets dismissed to cover their tracks. But the protagonists are still at large.

Even the right-wing networks in the police are being

covered up. To date, 69 threatening letters bearing the signature “NSU 2.0” have been sent to politicians, artists and celebrities, probably from the Hesse police force, without the source having been uncovered so far.

In Halle, the police had denied the Jewish community any protection from the Yom Kippur assassination. Even afterwards, the anti-Semitic threats did not abate. Meanwhile, a police officer who had silently removed a swastika made of cellulose from a building of the Jewish community is under investigation for obstruction of justice.

The number of anti-Semitic crimes in Germany last year reached a new record of 2,032. On average, more than five such crimes were committed each day. According to the police, 93 percent of these crimes came from the right wing. The terrorist attack in Halle was only the tip of the iceberg.

The deeper cause of this return of right-wing terror and anti-Semitism is the fundamental crisis of the capitalist system. The German ruling class, despite assertions to the contrary, has never really broken with its Nazi past. After the war, leading Nazis soon reoccupied leading positions in business, government, and education. Hans Globke, the co-author and commentator of the Nuremberg Race Laws, headed the Federal Chancellery for ten years under Konrad Adenauer. Former NSDAP (Nazi Party) member Kurt Georg Kiesinger even became Federal Chancellor in 1966.

Now, given growing class tensions and international conflicts, the brown-shirted underground is reappearing under the democratic whitewash. These are the objective circumstances that encouraged Balliet to undertake his barbaric act.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact