

Four killed in terrorist attack in Vienna

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3 November 2020

On Monday at 8pm local time, a major terrorist attack occurred in the center of Vienna near the capital's main synagogue. According to press reports, at least four people were killed and 22 injured; several are hospitalized. The assassin—reportedly armed an automatic rifle, handguns and an explosive belt—was killed by police and his apartment raided during the night.

The attack occurred in an area of the city center popular for its many bars and restaurants. The streets were particularly crowded as many tried to enjoy the nice weather on the eve of the lockdown. The attack began with one of the assailants shooting at passersby in the vicinity of the Seitenstetengasse synagogue. Soon thereafter, the shooting spread to other locations in the city center. The opera and one theater were evacuated.

At a press conference Monday morning, Austrian Interior Minister Karl Nehammer declared that suspected assassin Kujtim F. was a sympathizer of the “Islamic State”. He was 20 years old and had North Macedonian roots. As in many previous terrorist attack in Europe, he was known to the state. In the past he had wanted to leave for Syria to join ISIS, the minister told the news agency APA. He was prevented from doing so and instead was sentenced to 22 months in prison on April 25, 2019, for membership in a terrorist organization. However, he was “released early” on December 5.

At a later press conference, Nehammer announced that Austrian police had arrested 14 people allegedly linked to the assailant and raided 18 residences during investigations of the attack.

As the recent terrorist attacks in France the reveals once again the politically reactionary character of terrorism. Not only have innocent people been brutally killed and injured. The attack has provided the government and the political establishment in Austria

and throughout Europe with another opportunity to intensify their ongoing racist campaign against Muslims and migrants and strengthen the police state which is aimed at the entire working class.

In his brief address to the nation on Tuesday morning, Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz of the right-wing Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) pledged to “investigate and hunt down the perpetrators, their associates and like-minded people and bring them to justice”. He boasted that he deployed the military throughout the city in order to free up the police, thanking “the security forces, which are still in action for the safety of the population in our country.”

Kurz praised Austria's “international partners who expressed their solidarity just last night” and pledged: “Together with our international partners, we will lead the fight against extremism and terrorism. united by the rule of law, our liberal democracy and our fundamental values, we stand side by side to defend peace and security, not only in Austria but also in Europe and throughout the world.”

This is a transparent attempt to cover up the political responsibility of the Austrian and European ruling class for terrorist attacks across the continent. Subsequent Austrian governments have supported two decades of neocolonial wars in Central Asia and across the Middle East in which tens of millions have been killed, injured, or made refugees. Currently the Austrian military has soldiers deployed in Mali, Afghanistan and the Middle East to back the French- and US-led imperialist occupations of these former colonial countries.

In the most recent NATO-led wars against Libya and Syria, the imperialist powers backed Islamist organizations, including groups directly linked to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, as proxies to topple Muammar Gaddafi and Bashar al-Assad and install pro-Western regimes in Tripoli and Damascus. Islamist terrorists travelled freely between Europe and the

Middle East, under the eyes of the European intelligence agencies. The suspected assassin, Kujtim F. had already been convicted of a terrorist offence in Vienna last year. In 2018, F. had tried to join the terrorist "Islamic State" (IS) militia in Syria, but was picked up by police in Turkey.

The imperialist wars abroad have been accompanied by an aggressive anti-immigrant campaign by all the European governments. That was especially pronounced in Austria. In recent years, the Austrian government stood at the forefront of the shift to the far right of European politics, bearing direct responsibility for the growth of neo-fascist forces. Under Sebastian Kurz, the far right Freedom Party (FPÖ) was integrated into the government and took control of the interior ministry until the government collapsed in 2019.

When the ÖVP entered a coalition with the Greens, the right-wing policies of the FPÖ-ÖVP government were essentially continued. Much like in neighboring Germany, where the establishment parties deliberately encouraged the rise of the neo-fascist Alternative für Deutschland, while neo-Nazi networks flourish within the state, the Austrian far right was fostered by the existing parties and the state apparatus. The FPÖ has particularly close ties to the far right Identitarian movement (Identitäre Bewegung).

In 2019, it emerged that the neo-Nazi terrorist Brenton Tarrant, who perpetrated the horrific massacre of Christchurch in New Zealand, donated €1,500 to the Austrian Identitarian movement.

A warning must be made. As a consequence of the Islamist terror attacks in Vienna and France the ruling class will further turn to the fascistic forces in and outside the state apparatus to intimidate and suppress growing opposition in the working class.

The attack occurred under conditions of a profound social and economic crisis. The coronavirus pandemic has now entered its second wave in Europe, with case numbers exploding in France, Germany, across Eastern Europe, the UK, as well as Austria. With a population of under 9 million, Austria has been reporting over 4,000 infections every day for the past week, a rate similar to that of the UK and Italy. On Friday, the number of infections reached 5,627. The government has indicated that hospitals will not be able to cope if daily new cases rise to over 6,000.

The government has long opposed a necessary

shutdown. Now, much like Germany and France, it has only implemented a partial lockdown. Schools, kindergartens, shops and factories, the main sources of infection, remain open, while cultural institutions and restaurants have to shut down. The economic fallout of the pandemic has been severe. Unemployment has risen by 20 percent compared to last year. In early October, 409,000 people were looking for work—the equivalent of almost 2 percent of the working age population—the highest number since May 1946.



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