

# Neo-Nazis march in Germany on anniversary of anti-Jewish November Pogroms

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Commemorations marking the 82nd anniversary of the November Pogroms were cancelled or prohibited across Germany due to the coronavirus pandemic. By contrast, the right-wing extremist Pegida movement was allowed to hold a rally at Dresden's Altmarkt with the neo-Nazi Andreas Kalbitz as the main speaker.

On the night of November 9–10, 1938, Nazis across Germany torched synagogues, looted Jewish businesses, murdered hundreds of Jews and sent tens of thousands more to concentration camps. The November Pogroms, which were coordinated at the highest levels of the Nazi regime, marked a new phase in the persecution of the Jews, which culminated in the state-organised murder of 6 million people.

The Jewish community in Dresden responded with "astonishment and extreme anger" to the right-wing extremist march in the centre of the state capital of Saxony. "It is totally tasteless and ignorant of history that on November 9, a Pegida demonstration is allowed to take place," argued state rabbi Zsolt Balla. The German Orthodox Rabbi Conference criticised the fact that "right-wing extremist, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic sentiments are being chanted openly in the streets" while official commemorations were cancelled due to the pandemic.

Dresden Mayor Hilbert (Free Democrats) justified the authorisation of the right-wing extremist march by saying that neither Germany's Basic Law nor Saxony's law on gatherings provided a legal basis to restrict freedom of assembly. But this is a brazen lie.

"Heart not Hate," a broad alliance of churches, political parties and other organisations, which regularly mobilises against the Pegida marches, recalled the fact that the city authorities possess the powers to take such decisions and have repeatedly banned the alliance's rallies. For example, a demonstration against Pegida in 2015 involving 6,000 people was "discredited and suppressed by regulations."

"Heart not Hate" contacted the mayor prior to November 9 with the goal of not permitting any racist events in the city centre, reported spokeswoman Rita Kunert. But a planned meeting with the police and the authorities responsible for events was cancelled without any reason being given. With goodwill and a bit of common sense, it would have been possible to prevent Kalbitz's symbolically significant appearance on that day, she added.

Thomas Feist (Christian Democrats, CDU), the government of Saxony's commissioner for the Jewish community, also criticised

the city authorities for their unwillingness in the lead-up to the march "to speak with members of the Jewish community about options to prevent it."

The authorities in Salzwedel, Saxony-Anhalt, and Dannenberg, Lower Saxony, proved that a very different approach is possible. They banned events and justified this on the basis of the need to guard against infection. However, these were not marches by right-wing extremists, but commemorations for the victims of the November Pogroms.

In Salzwedel, a tour of the city's Stolpersteins, which are cobblestone-sized monuments located around German cities to commemorate Jewish victims of the Holocaust, was banned, despite the fact that the organisers, "Solidarity Action Salzwedel Alliance," presented a stringent plan to the authorities to reduce the risk of infection. This included a reduced number of participants and a requirement for everyone to wear a mask and observe social distancing. Only a decision by the administrative court in Magdeburg overturned the ban ordered by the local authorities. A candlelit procession to sites associated with Jewish life in Dannenberg was banned due to the pandemic.

Pegida's march in Dresden on November 9 is the latest in a long line of incidents in which the police, judiciary and governments have closely collaborated to promote the far right. The established parties, the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD) and neo-Nazis work hand-in-glove to this end. Saxony is a stronghold of this right-wing conspiracy.

Just two days earlier, on November 7, 20,000 people protested in Leipzig against the federal government's coronavirus restrictions, including hundreds of neo-Nazis from across the country. Although they ignored all public health measures, continued the demonstration after it had been officially suspended and launched violent attacks on protesters and journalists, the police allowed them to run riot. A growing number of videos have appeared online showing how police officers indicated their solidarity with the far-right demonstrators.

Saxony Minister President Michael Kretschmer and Interior Minister Roland Wöllner (both CDU), and federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU) have since given their full backing to the Leipzig police. "We must stop questioning the police's tactics in retrospect and from afar without any understanding of details and without the full picture," said Seehofer. "The police have my full backing."

It is also no mere coincidence that it was the regional high court

in Bautzen that gave the go-ahead for the “lateral thinkers” demonstration in the city centre against the wishes of the Leipzig city authorities, providing the right-wing extremists with a big stage.

The president of the court, Erich Künzler, was praised to the skies two years ago by the AfD. This followed his complaint in the *Freie Presse* newspaper that refugees whose asylum applications had been rejected by the court were not being deported. This damages the rule of law and undermines the judiciary, he claimed. They increasingly feel “like they are working for the dustbin.”

The AfD’s group in Saxony’s state parliament enthused, “Senior asylum judge adopts the AfD’s line: CDU asylum madness is undermining the rule of law.” The party newspaper, *AfD Kompakt*, wrote, “It is increasingly clear that the CDU wants to flood Germany with illegal immigrants. The criticism by the judge from Saxony is appropriate.”

The Association of Democratic Jurists and the Republican Lawyers Association (RAV) warned Künzler against engaging in “dangerous incitement on the extreme-right” immediately prior to Saxony’s state election. Dresden-based lawyer Kati Lang, who specialises in immigration law and is a member of the RAV executive, said, “The interview plays directly into the hands of the AfD. The statements are one-sided and an affront to people seeking protection, who trust in the legality of the German courts.”

The close ties between the government, state and right-wing extremists already emerged into the open during the summer of 2018, when leading AfD members and neo-Nazis marched side-by-side through Chemnitz and led a xenophobic mob in attacking immigrants, journalists and left-wing people, as well as a Jewish restaurant.

Kretschmer and Seehofer both backed the far-right march at the time. “There was no mob, no witch-hunt, there was no pogrom in Chemnitz,” claimed Kretschmer in a government statement. Seehofer expressed his understanding that “the population is enraged and angry,” and told the *Rheinische Post*, “If I were not a government minister, I would have taken to the streets as a citizen.”

Ever since, the intimate ties between the judiciary, police, intelligence agencies, the government, the AfD and neo-Nazis have become ever more obvious. Within the AfD leadership there are several representatives of the security agencies, which are also overrun by right-wing extremist networks. For example, Jens Maier, a judge at the Dresden district court, has been a parliamentary deputy for the AfD since 2017.

Steffen Janich, a police officer in Saxony, is local leader of the AfD in Pirna, and was one of the first to organise a very aggressive demonstration against public health restrictions in April. He was subsequently suspended from duty. He has been nominated for the AfD as a candidate for the federal parliamentary elections in the electoral district of former AfD leader Frauke Petry. The AfD deputy from Bautzen, Karsten Hilse, is also a police officer. When he spoke last week in parliament, he was wearing a “Lateral Thinker” T-shirt.

Prison official Daniel Zabel, who passed an arrest warrant for an asylum seeker suspected of a crime to members of the right-wing extremist milieu and thus triggered the rampage in Chemnitz, is

now a parliamentary deputy for the AfD in Saxony’s state parliament. Prior to that, he was handed a suspended sentence.

Maier, Janich and Zabel are believed to be members of the far-right “Wing” of the AfD, which continues to dominate the party even though it has been officially dissolved. The AfD leader in Brandenburg, Andreas Kalbitz, was one of the “Wing’s” leading spokesmen, together with the leader in Thuringia, Björn Höcke. However, Kalbitz was expelled from the AfD after it emerged that he had concealed his membership in a neo-Nazi organisation that was subsequently banned.

This expulsion, however, is purely cosmetic. Last week, Kalbitz pointedly stood directly in front of the stage as his political mentor, Alexander Gauland, the leader of the AfD’s group in the federal parliament, spoke at an event in Cottbus organised by the right-wing extremist Future Homeland organisation. The rally in Dresden marked Kalbitz’s first public speech since his expulsion.

Gordian Meyer-Plath, who headed the state intelligence agency in Saxony between 2013 and 2020, is active on the far right. He is a member of the thuggish student group Marchia Bonn and was heavily involved as an informant in the building up of the right-wing extremist milieu in Brandenburg, which had close ties to the National Socialist Underground (NSU) terrorist cell. At the beginning of the year, he was fired by Saxony Interior Minister Roland Wöllner, not because he is such a right-winger, but because he refused to delete data gathered on the AfD.

The right-wing extremist rally in Dresden on the anniversary of the November Pogroms underscores just how far advanced is the rightward lurch of the state and political establishment. All of the major parties are responsible for this. The Social Democrats joined Saxony’s state government in 2014, and the Greens followed in 2019. They provide backing to Minister President Kretschmer and political cover for the right-wing conspiracy within the state apparatus. The Left Party also firmly supports the judiciary and police.

By contrast, the right-wing extremists have hardly any support among the population. Only a few hundred participants joined the Pegida rally in Dresden. The right-wing extremists are being deliberately built up from above in order to intimidate and suppress mounting opposition to social inequality, militarism and the deadly reopening of the economy under conditions of the pandemic.



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