

German court sentences far-right Lübcke murderer: The fairytale of the lone wolf

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The Frankfurt Regional High Court delivered the sentencing in the trial of the murder of Kassel district president Walter Lübcke. It followed the same pattern as the sentencing issued by the Munich Regional High Court two-and-a-half years ago in the trial of the far-right terrorist National Socialist Underground: the main defendant received the maximum possible sentence, his accomplice a mild warning, and the right-wing extremist terrorist networks behind the murder and deeply rooted in the state apparatus were covered up and ignored.

The court sentenced the 47-year-old neo-Nazi Stephan Ernst to life imprisonment because he shot the Christian Democrat politician Lübcke on June 2, 2019, on the terrace of his house. The judges also stressed the particular severity of his guilt, which virtually excludes the possibility of parole after 15 years. After the end of the sentence, the court can order an additional period of security detention.

There was no doubt about Ernst's guilt. He was identified at the crime scene two weeks after the attack by traces of his DNA. After his arrest, he confessed to the crime and led the police to where the murder weapon was concealed. He subsequently withdrew his confession on the advice of a lawyer associated with the far-right milieu, before presenting a further confession. During the trial, he also acknowledged his part in the crime.

Ernst was acquitted on another charge. Although the state prosecutor presented extensive evidence, including traces of DNA on a knife found in Ernst's home, the court deemed it not to have been proven that Ernst sought to murder Ahmed I. on January 6, 2016. The Iraqi asylum seeker was attacked and stabbed near to Ernst's home.

Ernst's accomplice, the self-described neo-Nazi Markus H., was merely handed a suspended sentence of 18 months for violating firearm regulations. He had already been released from custody in October and left the court as a free man. The period of suspension will last three

years.

The state prosecutor accused H. of accessory to a murder and called for a sentence of nine years and eight months. They accused him of strengthening Ernst's resolve to go through with the murder, sharing his hatred, radicalising him, and teaching him how to shoot. Lübcke's family, which participated in the trial as a co-plaintiff, went further and accused H. of direct participation in the murder. They based themselves on a statement by Ernst, who incriminated his accomplice during the trial by saying that he was present at the crime scene on the night of the murder.

The judges rejected both accusations, of accessory to murder and the joint responsibility for the crime, with the claim that they had not been proven beyond doubt. They deemed Ernst's accusations as not credible, since he had described H.'s role in various ways at different times.

Yet it is obvious that "without H. Lübcke's murder would not have taken place," as the family's lawyer, Holger Matt, said in his closing arguments.

Ernst and H. knew each other since the 1990s from joint activities in neo-Nazi organisations. In October 2015, they visited the meeting in Lohfelden where Lübcke defended accommodating refugees in his district and opposed supporters of the far-right Pegida movement. H. then published a video of the meeting online, which made Lübcke the target of a right-wing campaign of agitation involving neo-Nazis, the Alternative for Germany, and members of Lübcke's own party, the CDU.

Ever since, Ernst and H. jointly prepared the murder. They practiced shooting, acquired an arsenal of weapons, attended AfD demonstrations and communicated over encrypted chats that they deleted after the murder. There is much to suggest that H. was the driving force behind this. During the search of his home, police found several firearms, munitions, a bust of Hitler, and right-wing literature. He kept his pens in an old canister of Zyklon-B,

the poison gas used by the Nazis to exterminate the Jews.

All of this was known. But neither the investigators nor the judges showed any interest in digging deeper. This would have inevitably drawn attention to the right-wing extremist networks in which Ernst and H. were active. They have extensive ties with the security apparatus and are covered up in high places. The court therefore stuck firmly to the narrative of the lone wolf and let H. walk free.

Already in September 2019, in an article entitled “The fascist network behind the murder of Walter Lübcke,” the WSWs stated: “Everything indicates that Ernst and Markus H. are part of a much larger right-wing terrorist network. Their case bears striking similarity to that of the far-right terrorist gang, the National Socialist Underground (NSU). ... It is now known that the neo-Nazi milieu in Kassel maintained close contact with the NSU, which carried out a total of 10 murders, including their ninth victim, Halit Yozgat, in Kassel in April 2006.”

According to the political scientist Hajo Funke, a leading expert on right-wing extremism, Ernst, who has a long criminal record, was active in a right-wing terrorist milieu, including “a who’s who of C18 and NSU supporters.” The Correctiv research platform recently presented a list of the connections between Ernst, the neo-Nazi milieu in Kassel, and the group of supporters around the NSU, which also included several informants for the domestic intelligence agency.

Ernst was himself a friend of the informant Benjamin Gärtner (code-name “vegetable”), who worked under the supervision of the intelligence official Andreas Temme. Temme was in Halit Yozgat’s internet cafe when he was murdered, and subsequently transferred to work in Walter Lübcke’s district office.

The information about this conspiracy is being suppressed by the state with an iron fist. The files of the Hesse state intelligence service, which could clarify the background to the Lübcke murder, will remain under lock and key on the order of the CDU/Green state government for decades. Neither the court nor the state prosecutor’s office wanted to challenge this.

The lawyer Alexander Hoffmann, who represented Ahmed I. in the Lübcke trial and was a co-plaintiff in the NSU trial, told *Der Spiegel* in an interview, “I’m no longer surprised, we already experienced during the NSU trial that the investigative authorities refuse to recognise and acknowledge structural problems and fundamental mistakes.”

“I thought politicians would see the attack on Walter

Lübcke as an attack on themselves and would therefore have a direct and immediate interest in this trial,” he added. “But we didn’t see any of that.” The politicians find it “difficult to clearly and fully delineate themselves from the right—even with regard to neo-Nazis. Because they would then have to delineate themselves fully in content, for example on refugee policy.”

Just two weeks after Lübcke’s murder, the WSWs warned, “In reality, Lübcke’s (sic) murder is not the result of a weak state, but rather the systematic promotion of right-wing extremists by the state and the ruling elite. This is the dirty secret of German politics. This support ranges from the outright trivialisation of right-wing extremist acts of violence, the blindness on the part of the intelligence agencies towards right-wing extremist groups, the deliberate promotion of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the downplaying of the Nazis’ crimes on university campuses, and the toleration of right-wing extremist terrorist groups by sections of the security apparatus.”

The ruling from the Frankfurt Regional High Court has vindicated this warning. Stephan Ernst was convicted as a “lone wolf,” but the right-wing extremist networks that made the murder possible are being covered up and continue with their work. As in the Weimar Republic, when paramilitary groups with state support terrorised the working class, these forces are needed to suppress popular opposition to social inequality, the strengthening of the repressive state apparatus and militarism.



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