

German police raid far-right antivaxers who planned a series of murders

Martin Nowak, Peter Schwarz
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On December 15, police in the East German state of Saxony carried out a large scale raid. Led by the state criminal police, 140 officers entered the homes of six suspects and seized evidence. The suspects, five men and one woman, are accused of preparing a “serious crime endangering the state.” They are alleged to have planned the assassination of the leader of Saxony’s state government, Michael Kretschmer (Christian Democratic Union), and other state politicians.

The German TV investigative program Frontal had reported on the assassination plans a week earlier. Two of its reporters infiltrated a chat group of radical vaccination opponents where the murder plans were being discussed. The reporters then secretly filmed meetings of group members.

The Telegram group Dresden Offlinevernetzung has over 100 members and is part of the far-right “Querdenker” movement, which plays down the danger of the COVID-19 pandemic and aggressively opposes mitigation measures, as well as vaccination. It maintains close links to anti-Semitic, esoteric and fascist circles. Quotes from Adolf Hitler and anti-Semitic hate posts were regularly shared within the group.

The six accused, who live in the cities of Dresden and Heidenau, are between 32 and 64 years old. Three crossbows, weapons and weapon parts as well as mobile phones, computers, storage media and other “substances” were seized by police in their raid. No arrest warrants have been issued so far. According to the state criminal police, most of the weapons found did not require a permit. However, further proceedings have been initiated against individual suspects for violations of the Weapons Act, the Explosives Act and the Narcotics Act.

Among the accused are several well known extreme-right wingers and neo-Nazis. The administrator and apparent leader of the group, Daniel G., is alleged to have reacted aggressively towards members of the press and counterdemonstrators at anti-vaccine demonstrations and in chat messages he threatened to shoot vaccination teams if they appeared at his door.

Sebastian Pierre A., who was active in the chat group under his real name, is a well-known Dresden neo-Nazi and Jürgen S., whose flat was also searched, is known in Dresden as an activist within the racist Pegida movement. Both A. and S. are also said to have campaigned during elections on behalf of the extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.

According to a report in the weekly *Die Zeit*, the group members also include an employee of the city administration, an employee of the local Stasi (former East German secret police) documentation authority and a member of the “Querdenker” group “Parents Stand Up.” However, they are not under investigation.

Frontal has documented chat histories of the Telegram group. One participant mentions an “offline meeting” where the comment was made, “we’re going to kill the premier.” Another replies: “In theory, you should march in on the guy, drag him out, hang him up somewhere—and then the next one, and so on.”

One participant regrets that it was not possible to storm the Bundestag during a Querdenker demonstration in Berlin in November 2020: “... you

would have needed a million there, including some who are really determined to go to the Bundestag.” Another says that they are looking for patriots “who are prepared to take up arms, if necessary, against these stupid bastards who want to oppress and destroy us.”

The assassination plans against state premier Kretschmer and other members of the government must be taken seriously. How far these right-wing elements are prepared to go was made clear by the assassination of the president of the Kassel government, Walter Lübcke, by a neo-Nazi two-and-a-half years ago.

According to the State Office of Criminal Investigation, there were more than 200 criminal offences against public officials and elected representatives in Saxony in 2021 related to the pandemic and anti-coronavirus measures. On December 3, 30 far-right extremists marched with torches in front of the house of Saxony’s minister of social affairs and health, Petra Köpping (Social Democratic Party, SPD), loudly chanting slogans against a “corona dictatorship.”

How Saxony became a centre of right-wing extremism

The Frankenstein monster threatening Kretschmer and other government politicians is a product of their own doing. Saxony has become a magnet for neo-Nazis and right-wing extremists from all over the country since the reintroduction of capitalism in East Germany over three decades ago. These far-right forces have in turn been tolerated and promoted by the highest state authorities.

The main target of the hatred of these extremists are not the politicians active in the CDU and SPD, but rather the socialist traditions of the working class, which stretch back to the 19th century when August Bebel founded the SPD in Saxony. Saxony was also the centre of opposition to the East German Stalinist ruling party (the Socialist Unity Party, SED), which, in the early years of the GDR, largely came from the left.

The state was hit particularly hard by the reintroduction of capitalism. The GDR’s main industries and industrial research had been concentrated in Saxony and in East Berlin. Saxony was the base for many large factories with several thousand employees, which were all closed down following reunification. Entire regions in the East were subject to mass unemployment within a very short period of time. Eighty-five percent of those involved in industrial research also lost their jobs.

The enormous frustration that resulted was then deliberately steered into right-wing channels in order to prevent working class resistance breaking out in militant struggles.

It is not possible in a single article to list all the cases in which the government, police, Germany’s domestic intelligence agency (Office for the Protection of the Constitution) and the judiciary promoted the extreme right. These are just some of the most significant.

As early as 1990, the high-ranking CDU politician Kurt Biedenkopf was appointed premier of the newly created “Free State of Saxony” and assembled an ultra-right cabinet. His first head of chancellery was Arnold Vaatz, a CDU member on the far right of the party. Vaatz currently has close links to the AfD. The first justice minister in Saxony—responsible for the selection of judges and prosecutors—was the ultra-conservative Steffen Heitmann, who notoriously downplayed the crimes of National Socialism and resigned from the CDU in 2015 in protest against the opening of Germany’s borders to refugees.

Biedenkopf himself, who died last summer, always denied that there were far-right extremists in Saxony. As late as 2017, he told *Die Zeit*: “I said that the Saxons are immune to right-wing radicalism. That is still my view today.” His comments were made although the neofascist German Democratic Party (NDP) had sat in the Saxony state parliament for two legislative periods and the AfD had the largest share of the vote in Saxony in the federal election of the same year!

The Saxon police, public prosecutors and judiciary are notorious for their systematic persecution of leftists and their tolerance of the extreme right. Jens Maier, who sat in the Bundestag from 2017 to 2021 as a representative of the AfD’s extreme völkisch faction Flügel, was a former judge at the Dresden Regional Court, where he handed down sentences favourable to the NPD. The NSU neofascist terror cell was able to carry out its series of 10 murders undisturbed in Chemnitz, Saxony, under the eyes of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV). Gordian Meyer-Plath, who later became head of the Saxony state BfV, supervised undercover agent Carsten Szczepanski, who kept him informed about the activities of the NSU.

The anti-refugee Pegida movement also emerged in Dresden in 2015 and enjoyed the backing of the state, government parties and media from the onset. The then Minister of the Interior Markus Ulbig (CDU) met with Pegida leaders for talks only a few months after the group’s first anti-refugee demonstrations. Over a period of six years the head of the state BfV, Meyer-Plath, refused to declare Pegida a far-right movement.

In 2018, when well-known neo-Nazis and AfD leaders marched side by side through Chemnitz and far-right extremists attacked immigrants and a Jewish restaurant, state premier Kretschmer—along with federal BfV President Hans-Georg Maaßen, Arnold Vaatz and Steffen Heitmann—all publicly defended the far-right demonstration. This only served to embolden the ultra-right.

For its part the Left Party and its predecessor, the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), also contributed to the strengthening of the far right. Christine Ostrowski, a leading figure in the PDS in Dresden for many years, met with neo-Nazi cadres as early as 1993. At a later date she founded a PDS business association and supported the sale of social housing to rent sharks. In 2016, she called for a vote for the AfD.

The “Querdenker” movement and right-wing extremists

A similar constellation of political forces then emerged nationwide at the far-right “Querdenker” demonstrations against COVID-19 protective measures. Far-right extremists with close ties to the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), police and AfD called for protests and mobilised disoriented, frustrated and backward social layers. Leading political forces and the media provided massive coverage of such protests. The far right was used to create the political climate for a pandemic policy aimed at subordinating human health and lives to profit accumulation.

The courts, authorities and police gave the right-wing demonstrators free rein, although it was clear that agreed hygiene regulations were not being observed and police officers were attacked with pyrotechnics, as was the

case in Leipzig in November 2020. Premier Kretschmer nevertheless continued his “dialogues” and “citizens’ discussions” with right-wing extremists, and in May 2020 held discussions with Querdenker in Dresden.

Saxony’s Interior Minister Roland Wöllner (CDU) glorified the protests as mere “walks” that did not violate regulations and therefore could not be broken up by the police. At a conference of interior ministers on December 3, Wöllner stressed the need for “tougher penalties against smuggling” to prevent the “smuggling of asylum seekers from Belarus” and combat the threat of “left-wing extremism in Germany, for example in the city of Leipzig.” He did not mention the violent activities of the Querdenker.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that Saxony has a rate of 305 COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants—more than double the national average. Both last autumn and again this year, the state government stood idly by as the pandemic spread. Saxony’s minister of culture, Christian Piwarz, was one of the first politicians to decide on the “incidence-independent” opening of schools and day care centres, thus allowing children to be contaminated without hindrance. The state administration only reacted with some protective measures when triage was already being practised in local hospitals and crematoria were overloaded.

In this climate far-right networks and groups, often with close links to the police, armed forces and the BfV, have been able to flourish.

In February of this year, the Free Saxons party was founded by well known right-wing extremists from the city of Chemnitz and the Erzgebirge region. Its best-known members include Martin Kohlmann and Robert Andres from Pro Chemnitz and Stefan Hartung from the NPD. Kohlmann was among the main initiators of the far-right march in Chemnitz in 2018.

Right-wing extremists from all over Germany were present at the founding of the Free Saxons. The party is in turn linked via the internet with neofascist parties such as the NPD, Die Rechte and Dritter Weg, the AfD, the Reichsbürger milieu, *Compact* magazine and Doctors for Enlightenment. The latter group has ties to the association Mediziner und Wissenschaftler für Gesundheit, Freiheit und Demokratie (Physicians and Scientists for Health, Freedom and Democracy), which was initiated by vaccine opponents and charlatans such as Bodo Schiffmann, Stefan Homburg and the bestselling author Sucharit Bhakdi.

MDR media describes the close personal links between: “... people who know each other, it’s a scene... This networking is now resurfacing and is once again active.” These ties extend to Germany’s governing parties. For example, the long-time deputy mayor and leader of the CDU in the city of Freiberg, Holger Reuter, had to resign after it became known that he was a regular participant in far-right protests and, in an interview, had compared the police tactic of “kettling the unvaccinated” to the Armenian genocide.

The police raid against the Telegram group Dresden Offlinevernetzung should not be misinterpreted. The situation is reminiscent of conditions in the Weimar Republic, which was teeming with violent far-right groups. At that time, following WWI, the state sometimes felt compelled to rap the knuckles of the far right when they went too far. Invariably, however, they remained at large or got off with a light sentence even in cases of political assassination or—in the case of Adolf Hitler in 1923, who was sentenced to a short period in jail after attempting a violent coup. The far right were needed to intimidate and terrorise the working class.

As always, when such neofascist networks can no longer be denied, politicians invoke with feigned indignation that democracy must be defended and declare a crackdown. While the true extent of the right-wing networks is concealed, isolated incidents are used to justify the build up of state forces, which are ultimately directed against workers and leftists.

A good example is the demand by Premier Kretschmer for additional staff to conduct a “struggle against extremists.” Representatives from all

of Germany's main parties are also demanding state control of the Telegram internet service, i.e., censorship. If the internet providers do not comply with the request to delete content, "then there are also possibilities to block content," declared CSU (Christian Social Union) leader Markus Söder. Renate Künast for the Green Party called for "clear regulation" and declared: "The future of democracy is clearly decided in the net, so we must finally stop lagging behind."

The build up of a "strong state," i.e., the strengthening of the secret services and police, promotes those forces it is declared to oppose. The struggle against the fascist danger, the official profit-before-lives policy, social inequality, militarism and buildup of state forces requires an independent working class movement based on a socialist programme.



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