

German police kill four people in just one week

Marianne Arens
12 August 2022

Candles lie on the pavement, an anonymous person has sprayed “No Justice No peace” on the ground. On the previous Monday, 16-year-old Mohammed D. was shot dead by the police in the courtyard of the St. Antonius congregation in Dortmund in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

His fate is all the more tragic since he ought to have received special protection. As an unaccompanied minor, Mohammed only recently fled Senegal. On the day before his death, he reportedly visited a psychiatric clinic at his own initiative because of the risk of suicide, but was released. On Tuesday, a guardian of the youth facility where he lived alerted the police because he saw Mohammad handling a knife.

No less than eleven heavily armed policemen arrived, who first subjected the young man (who did not understand German) to pepper spray and electric batons and then shot him with a machine gun. Five shots hit him in the stomach, in the forearm, twice on the shoulder and once even in the face. They shattered the boy’s jaw, who died shortly afterwards in the hospital.

The latest police murder highlights the increased readiness of the German police to use violence. Four missions in just one week, as different as they were, all ended in the use of deadly force:

On Tuesday, August 2, special operations (SEK) officers shot a homeless 23-year-old Somali in Frankfurt’s Bahnhofsviertel. So far, only what the Hesse State Criminal Police Office reported is known. According to this, the police were called because a man in a hotel in the Red Light District had threatened two women. Armed with a knife, he injured a police dog when the officers arrived. Around 4 a.m., the young man was executed with a shot to the head.

- The following day, August 3, Jozef Berditchewski (48) was killed by police bullets during a forced eviction in Cologne. He is said to have resisted eviction from his home. Policemen attacked him with pepper spray and then fired their weapon.

- On Sunday night, August 7, a police operation in Oer-Erkenschwick near Recklinghausen had a deadly ending. A 39-year-old is said to have rioted in his apartment. The policemen called to the scene first used pepper spray and “fixed” him, whereupon he lost consciousness and died a short time later.

- So when the police shot Mohammed D. in Dortmund on

Monday afternoon, this was the fourth horrific case in just one week in which police officers killed a person.

In response to Mohammed’s death, around 250 people spontaneously took to the streets on Tuesday and another 400 on Wednesday. With shouts of “Murderer! Killer!” they marched through Dortmund’s Nordstadt. A mourning and protest rally in front of the house of the victim Jozef Berditchewski took place last Saturday in Cologne under the slogan “Evictions destroy lives.”

Jozef was by no means the “violent Russian,” as numerous media outlets, especially the *Bild* newspaper, portrayed him. *Bild* wrote: “The dead man is said to be a native Russian who was often drunk and then rioted.” The newspaper emphasized in particular: “A Soviet flag hangs on the balcony.”

In reality, Jozef was a virtuoso street musician who was well known and respected in Cologne. Born in St. Petersburg, Jozef came from a Russian-Jewish family. His mother was a well-known Russian violinist, and he devoted himself to classical music from the age of 12. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the 19 year-old came to Germany because he did not want to fight against Chechnya as a Russian soldier. Later he studied at the Cologne University of Music. There is a WDR report about him, which was posted on YouTube and can be seen here.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the ban on all street performers in Cologne also threw Jozef off the rails and deprived him of his livelihood. Added to this was the vicious Russophobia, which the media continues to deliberately fuel to this day to whip up support for the imperialist proxy war in Ukraine.

Jozef was known to the authorities as suicidal. How desperate he was can be seen in the official report. There, Chief Prosecutor Ulrich Bremer writes: “The deceased was already known to the police and courts. Most recently, he was indicted by the public prosecutor’s office at the Cologne District Court in June 2022. The charge was based on the accusation of having resisted police officers after the accused announced his suicide and had kicked the police officers who had rushed to his aid.”

The bureaucratically cold report makes it quite clear in passing that Joseph should not have been evicted from his

apartment under such conditions, because evictions are prohibited if there is a risk of suicide.

The other cases also appear to have involved exceptional psychological crises for the victims. In order to deescalate such situations, experienced psychologists or social workers, not militarily-armed cops, ought to be present. For years, it has been known that the overwhelming majority of people killed by police officers were in a “state of psychological emergency.” This applies to two-thirds of all victims, according to a report by the RBB television channel in 2014.

In Oer-Erkenschwick on August 8, the alleged “rioter” was pepper sprayed, subdued and “immobilised.” He lost consciousness and died a little later. The police report states: “There are indications that the man from Oer-Erkenschwick had taken drugs.” What are the indications? Was his death actually the result of drug use? What role did the police “immobilisation” play, which interfered with his breathing, or the use of pepper spray? This method of exposing people to irritable gas is extremely dangerous and can lead to death, for example, for people who have taken psychotropic drugs.

All four deaths have been investigated, but it is doubtful whether the real causes and circumstances will ever come to light. The police headquarters in Dortmund is responsible for the case in Oer-Erkenschwick, and the one in Recklinghausen, to which Oer-Erkenschwick belongs, is responsible for uncovering the events in Dortmund. (The same applies to the neighbouring cities of Bonn and Cologne.) In recent cases, this means that the police department charged with Mohammed’s death is investigating the colleagues responsible for the death in Oer-Erkenschwick—and vice versa.

This practice, which the Ministry of the Interior of North Rhine-Westphalia claims guarantees a “neutral investigation,” has long been criticized by the German Bar Association (DAV). Instead, the association calls for an independent complaints body. In fact, police officers are practically never convicted of fatalities. The figures of the Federal Statistical Office show how low the chances of success after a complaint are. According to him, in 2020, out of 4500 investigative cases against police officers, only 70 cases were opened.

The killing of four people during police operations in less than a week marks a new level of police violence in Germany. It is reminiscent of American circumstances, where police attacks with fatal outcomes occur several times a day, more than 1,000 times a year. In the current year 2022, 588 people have already been murdered by the police in the USA. Two years ago, pictures of the brutal police murder of George Floyd triggered protests around the world.

In Germany, there are also repeated murders by the police, but so far not in such large numbers. The website polizeischuesse.cilip.de, which lists all incidents, has counted since reunification in 1991 at least 315 cases in which “persons were killed by bullets from the German police.” Other victims died in police custody, such as Oury Jalloh, or were killed in

connection with a brutal deportation.

In parallel with the war policy of the “traffic light coalition” (Social Democratic Party, Free Democratic Party, Greens) and its rearmament of the state apparatus, this deadly practice is currently on the rise. This development is a sign of the ruling elite’s fear at the growing resistance of the working class.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the ruling class pursued a systematic profit-for-life policy. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, inflation has been fuelled more and more, jobs have been destroyed and the living conditions of the socially vulnerable have been endangered. Due to glaring social inequality, a huge social storm is brewing.

This is the reason why ruling politicians, under all circumstances, protectively put themselves in front of trigger-happy policemen and defend them even when their right-wing extremism and racism are openly exposed.

In Hesse, in connection with the police scandal surrounding the far-right terrorist NSU 2.0 hate messages, it has now emerged that the head of the internal police investigation himself is said to have manipulated the results and warned other colleagues. In addition, he used to belong to the same SEK (special operations) unit associated with right-wing chats. A second supervisor from the police investigation office is also accused of having warned officials about the internal investigations.

At a press conference on August 10 in North Rhine-Westphalia, Minister of the Interior Herbert Reul (Christian Democrats) explicitly defended the police officers who shot Mohammed D. It was a matter of seconds, said Reul, and the boy (who was actually already blinded by tear gas) ran towards the police with a knife. “And in this situation,” said Reul, “it was about the question: Does he stab—or do the police shoot?”

This is nothing more than a carte blanche for further police murders.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact