The Hamburg massacre: Symptom of a brutalized society

Gregor Link, Johannes Stern
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The fatal shootings in Hamburg killed eight people on Thursday evening at the premises of the Jehovah's Witnesses religious community. The victims include four men and two women, between 33 and 60 years, as well as the unborn child of another woman. The dead also include the suspected murderer, Philipp Fusz, who, according to the investigating authorities, "executed himself" following the crime. Eight other people were injured, four seriously, with several needing immediate hospitalization.

In a statement on its website Friday, the religious community said it was "deeply saddened" by the horrific rampage on the members of its congregation. "Our deepest sympathies go out to the families of the victims as well as to the traumatized eyewitnesses. The chaplains of the local community are doing their best to offer them assistance in this difficult hour." According to the latest reports, four of the wounded are still fighting for their lives. The Jehovah's Witnesses reject blood transfusions.

While many questions remain unanswered, there is no question that this was one of the worst fatal attacks in Germany in recent memory. At a joint press conference Friday noon, the Hamburg state Interior Ministry, the investigating public prosecutor's office and spokesmen for the Hamburg police provided the following account of the crime:

Philipp Fusz (35)—armed with a semi-automatic handgun and hundreds of rounds of ammunition—shortly before 9 p.m., entered the parking lot of the building where the service was being held. There, he had first fired ten shots at the car of a witness, who was able to save herself, being only slightly injured, and make an initial emergency call. Subsequently, Fusz had opened fire through the windowpanes on the 36 worshippers gathered in the hall and had gained access to the interior of the building "constantly using [his] firearms." In total, the alleged perpetrator fired 135 shots at his victims—a massacre.

Video taken by a resident shows a person dressed in black repeatedly shooting into the building from the outside through a broken window until the person finally enters the building and continues shooting inside. According to consistent statements from police and uninvolved witnesses, one person fled to the second floor when emergency personnel arrived. While the police secured the first floor and proceeded upstairs, a final shot was heard, whereupon the suspected perpetrator and the murder weapon were found.

Chief of Operations Matthias Tresp told the press that it was a "lucky coincidence" that members of a special unit of the Hamburg riot police were in the vicinity. A total of almost 1,000 officers were deployed in the police operation, including 52 federal police officers and special forces from Schleswig-Holstein. Later, 15 more magazines and 200 additional rounds of ammunition were found in Fusz's apartment; data media and writings were also seized.

In recent days, more information about the alleged perpetrator has become known. Apparently, Fusz had developed psychological problems and a strong hatred for the religious community to which he himself had belonged until a year and a half ago. According to Hamburg's Interior Senator (state minister) Andy Grote (Social Democratic Party, SPD), Fusz had left the Jehovah's Witnesses "voluntarily, but not on good terms." Media reports shedding light on Fusz's background paint a picture of a personality who was outwardly inconspicuous but also characterized by self-aggrandizement, doom-mongering and ideological delusions.

On his website, Fusz presented himself as a "multicultural" and "self-confessed European" and offered his services internationally as a "business consultant"—for a daily rate of €250,000. He justified the horrendous fee by claiming that his "work" should provide clients with "leverage or added value of at least €2.5 million." At the same time, Fusz propagated a crude, religious worldview laced with right-wing extremist elements.

In late 2022, he published a tract titled "The Truth About God, Jesus Christ and Satan: A New Reflected View of Epochal Dimensions." The pamphlet, which Fusz describes on his website as a "standard work ... for all sciences related to humanity, public relations, politics, economics and ethics," has since been deleted from Amazon and other online platforms. According to media reports, it also contains anti-Semitic messages, calling Nazi leader Adolf Hitler a "human instrument of Jesus Christ" and the persecution of Jews an "act of heaven." Hitler, he says, received his idea of a "millennial kingdom" from Jesus and wanted to implement it for him.

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While it is unclear whether and to what extent Fusz's religious glorification of Hitler motivated the rampage—Jehovah's Witnesses were brutally persecuted by the Nazis—the perpetrator was known to authorities. In December, the Hamburg firearms authority had issued him a weapons permit. According to Hamburg Police Chief Ralf Martin Meyer, an anonymous letter had been received by the police in January asking the authorities to "check Fusz's behaviour and weapons permit."

In February, Fusz was then visited by the firearms authorities. But although the officers immediately found that some of the ammunition was not properly stored, this only resulted in a verbal warning. According to Meyer, there were no indications in publicly available sources that Fusz was an extremist. This claim is obviously false and raises serious questions about the role of the security services, which in Germany are riddled with right-wing extremists.

If leading government politicians, such as federal Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (SPD), are now calling for tighter gun laws in response to the massacre, this is also intended to distract from the deeper causes of the violence. Massacres are becoming more frequent not only in the US, where more than 70 people have already died in mass shootings this year, but also in Germany. Following the far-right terrorist attacks in Munich (July 2016), Halle (October 2019) and Hanau (February 2020), which specifically targeted immigrants and Jews, four massacres have occurred at educational institutions alone since the beginning of 2022.

• In January 2022, an 18-year-old student shot and killed a young woman and injured three others in a lecture hall at Heidelberg University.

• In May 2022, a 21-year-old former student at Lloyd Gymnasium in Bremerhaven shot a school secretary with a crossbow, critically injuring her.

• In June 2022, a 34-year-old man in Hamm killed a 30-year-old female teaching assistant and injured two 22-year-old female students and a 22-year-old male student in a rampage at Hamm-Lippstadt University of Applied Sciences.

• In January 2023, a 55-year-old teacher was stabbed to death at a vocational college in Ibbenbüren. The alleged perpetrator, a 17-year-old student, turned himself in to the police.

The increase in this mass violence cannot simply be explained by individual motives and problems. It has deeper social causes that are systematically ignored by politicians and the media. Against what social and political background did the rampage in Hamburg take place? These are only some of the most obvious aspects:

In Ukraine, the NATO powers are waging a murderous proxy war against the nuclear power Russia. Although hundreds of Russian and Ukrainian soldiers die every day and the conflict conjures up the threat of a devastating third world war, the German government rejects a negotiated settlement. The ruling class is using the war as an opportunity to reassert itself as a major military power after its horrific crimes in two world wars.

The military offensive is accompanied by deafening war propaganda. Deadly weapons such as rockets and tanks are cynically glorified as messengers of peace, and Nazism is trivialized ("Hitler was not vicious") by university professors who are courted by the media. While the military has been given €100 billion virtually overnight, spending on education, social services and health care is being massively cut. Mass layoffs are the order of the day; poverty, stress, insecurity and fear characterize the lives of millions.

Added to this is the experience of the coronavirus pandemic, which has so far claimed the lives of more than 170,000 people in Germany alone. Over the last three years, human life has been systematically subordinated to profit. Leading politicians conducted a fascistic debate about how many lives should be sacrificed to the interests of the economy and declared that human dignity did not necessarily include the right to life and was thus not "absolutely" protected by the constitution.

In other words: from the point of view of the ruling class, human life is worth nothing. Ultimately, massacres like the one in Hamburg are symptoms of a deeply sick and anti-human system that must be fundamentally changed. As the *World Socialist Web Site* writes in its 2023 New Year's Perspective:

"In their promotion of 'herd immunity' as a legitimate response to the pandemic and in their willingness to risk nuclear war in a confrontation with Russia, the imperialist powers are demonstrating a homicidal contempt for the lives of the great mass of the world's population. Only the intervention of the working class, armed with an international socialist program, can provide humanity with a way out of the disaster created by capitalism."

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