

Germany: The commemoration of the racist shooting spree in Hanau and the SPD's crocodile tears

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Last weekend, tens of thousands of people commemorated the murderous shooting spree in Hanau, Germany four years ago. On Saturday, 8,000 to 10,000 people marched from the suburb of Kesselstadt to Hanau, from crime scene to crime scene. People also took to the streets in Berlin, Kassel and elsewhere to commemorate Hanau.

On February 19, 2020, 43-year-old racist Tobias Rathjen randomly shot nine young people from his neighbourhood before killing his mother and himself. “Say their names” is the slogan under which the memory of Kaloyan Velkov, Fatih Saraçoğlu, Sedat Gürbüz, Vili Viorel Pîun, Gökhan Gültekin, Mercedes Kierpacz, Ferhat Unvar, Hamza Kurtovi? and Said Nesar Hashemi has been kept alive ever since.

On Monday, relatives, survivors and friends gathered at Hanau's main cemetery to commemorate those murdered. During this ceremony, an open conflict arose when Federal Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (Social Democrat, SPD) insisted on appearing at the cemetery together with other SPD politicians and speaking to the press. With a tearful undertone, she vowed to do everything she could to “fight hard” against right-wing extremism.

Faeser's bottomless hypocrisy was clearly unwelcome. Armin Kurtovi?, father of the murdered Hamza Kurtovi?, opposed the political appropriation, which he described as “dishonest and immoral.” He angrily told the local television programme “Hessenschau”: “They should take responsibility first and then come [here] afterwards.”

Speaking on behalf of the relatives, Kurtovi? explained: “There are lots of cameras at every anniversary, which creates very false images. The politicians at the side of the relatives—that's a false image. We had to uncover everything on our own. Everything that came out, we found out on our own.” He summarised: “Everyone says: ‘Hanau never again,’ but if no consequences are drawn from what happened, it will happen again.”

To this day, the reasons for the obvious state failure on February 19, 2020 and afterwards have not been clarified. No politician, police chief or federal prosecutor has taken responsibility for the chain of “mistakes” that made the horrific

murders possible in the first place. No one has apologised to the bereaved. Here are some of the important questions that remain unanswered to this day:

- Why was the 110 police emergency number unavailable during the critical time of the murders? The courier driver Vili Viorel Pîun, who was following the perpetrator, tried in vain several times to reach the emergency number before the murderer shot him.

- Why was the locked escape door at the last crime scene not a subject of the investigation for a long time? It was probably due to a request from the police, who had often organised raids here. The Arena Bar, the last crime scene, was not even the subject of a proper crime scene report.

- Why were the victims autopsied without their families finding out and being able to comment? Kurtovi?'s son Hamza underwent an autopsy while the family was still desperately searching for him. According to the authorities, who described the blond boy's appearance in the report as “oriental-southern,” no “person authorised to object” was known.

- Why did the perpetrator, a psychopathic racist known to the authorities, legally possess several weapons? How can it be that Tobias Rathjen was allowed to undergo thorough shooting training, even though the authorities had several letters from him that clearly placed him in the periphery of the right-wing terrorist, anti-Muslim mass murderer Anders Breivik?

Rathjen's father Hans-Gerd was apparently the murderer's buddy and confidant. To this day, Rathjen senior lives unmolested in Hanau-Kesselstadt and uses his German shepherd to intimidate neighbours and their children and make racist threats. In 2011, he stood as a candidate for the Hanau local council on the Green Party list. Rathjen senior repeatedly referred to Thilo Sarrazin (SPD) and his racist tract “Deutschland schafft sich ab” (“Germany abolishes itself”).

This murderer's father is a ticking time bomb. But the really dangerous thing is that right-wing extremists like Rathjen have enjoyed the backing of the state authorities for years. On the night of the crime, a unit of the special task force (SEK) of the Frankfurt police was deployed in Hanau, which later had to be disbanded in June 2021 due to right-wing extremist activities.

Despite all this, the night of the murders in Hanau is considered to be the act of a “lone wolf,” like all right-wing extremist murders before and since, be it in Mölln, Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Dessau, Cologne, Duisburg, Munich, Dortmund, Celle, Kleve, Kassel or Halle.

With bitter irony, “So many right-wing extremist isolated incidents” was one of the slogans at the demonstration on Saturday, which was organised under the motto “Remembering means changing.” What was hardly mentioned in the media was the fact that posters with the names of all the victims were carried at the demonstration, not just the victims of Hanau, but of all right-wing extremist murders in recent years—a huge number. Some changed the motto to “Remembering means fighting” or “No forgiving, no forgetting.” When a speaker at the Hanau market declared that racism was at home in all the establishment parties, the crowd responded with thunderous applause.

Despite all this, SPD representative Faeser forced her way into the commemoration at the cemetery two days later against the wishes of the relatives. “In these days,” said the interior minister, “when others are trying to politically marginalise people again, to take them out of the country, to deport them—such fantasies are unfortunately prevalent these days. And it is all the more important right now to keep the memory alive and to stand by the relatives, but above all to fight hard against right-wing terrorism and extremism.”

In reality, it is Faeser herself who is “politically marginalising people and removing them from the country.” Only recently, the Bundestag (federal parliament) passed the “Repatriation Improvement Act,” which she initiated as interior minister. Recently, on the cover of Germany’s most-read news weekly *Der Spiegel*, Chancellor Olaf Scholz (also SPD), was depicted with his demand: “We must finally deport people on a grand scale.”

The SPD and all the other establishment parties are putting the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) anti-immigrant programme into practice and are courting the neo-fascist party, which Faeser did not even mention by name in Hanau. They cover up the right-wing extremist networks in the police, the secret service and the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) and prevent the background to terrorist attacks such as those in Hanau and Halle, or the NSU murders, from being uncovered.

As SPD state chairwoman in Hesse, Faeser also negotiated the coalition agreement between the SPD and the Christian Democrats (CDU) to form the state government in Wiesbaden. The WSWs described this as a “declaration of war on refugees.” The agreement is full of AfD battle terms such as “repatriation offensive,” “irregular migration,” “protection of external borders” and “expansion of detention pending deportation.”

Faeser is in favour of deportations, increasing the powers of the state, more money for the police as well as arms deliveries from Hesse and the whole of Germany to Ukraine and Israel.

The ruling elite is once again relying on authoritarian methods and a police state to enforce its policy of war and social attacks.

What drove Faeser to shed her crocodile tears in Hanau was concern about the growing resistance among the population. For weeks, hundreds of thousands have been taking to the streets against the AfD, fascism and right-wing extremism. Millions around the world are demonstrating against Israel’s bloody genocide in Gaza and against imperialist war policies, while workers in the factories are taking up the fight against mass redundancies and wage theft.

In Hanau, thousands took part in the memorial march to set an example against fascism and war. Members of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed the appeal made by the Rail Action Committee: “Stop the military transports! No weapons for the war in Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza!” and many responded very favourably.

Alfredo, an older worker from Hanau, spontaneously declared that he had been hoping for such an initiative. “Peace is possible,” he said. “Nobody wants war—what’s it good for? War is completely useless for the population, only capitalism profits from it. They will send our sons to war.”

“I haven’t listened to the news for months,” Alfredo said, “since the war started, because otherwise I get too upset. Our chancellor is happy to open a weapons factory and proudly presents a hand grenade to the camera. I get goosebumps when I see something like that. It makes me think of the images from the Second World War, when hardly a stone was left unturned in Berlin. Our grandparents lived through the last war and suffered greatly. There were many deaths in my family.”

A young worker, who had travelled three hours with his wife to be present in Hanau, explained that he wanted to “take a stand and send a signal against racism, fascism and all forms of discrimination.” He told the WSWs, “Our politicians are going in the wrong direction: these people are no longer representatives of the people in the interests of the community, because they are more interested in lucrative lobbying.”



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