

Hanau shooting memorial highlights political shift to the right in Germany's political establishment

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Last Saturday, on a dreary and damp afternoon, about 600 people gathered in Hanau to commemorate the victims of the murderous 19 February 2020 attack.

The rally on the market square and the march to Hanau-Kesselstadt were attended mainly by the relatives and friends of the victims, Hanau families with children, and supporters of the “19 February Initiative.” Many carried the well-known placards with the faces of the nine young Hanau residents whom a fascist killer had murdered in cold blood six years ago. A tenth victim, Ibrahim Akku? (70), died on 10 January 2026 from the belated effects of the night of the murders.

Two relatives spoke at the rally: Emi? Gürbüz, mother of the murdered Sedat Gürbüz, and Çetin Gültekin, the older brother of Gökhan Gültekin, who was also killed that night. “The families of the relatives demand justice, not pity!” said the spokeswoman for the “19 February Initiative,” who moderated the rally. “Hanau was not an isolated case,” she said. This was vividly demonstrated by a representative of the “Lorenz Initiative” from Oldenburg, who reported on the cowardly police murder of 21-year-old Lorenz A. in April 2025 and presented a harrowing list of victims of police violence in recent years.

Çetin Gültekin, Gökhan Gültekin’s older brother, who published a book about his murdered brother in 2024, referred in his speech to the threatening rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), and said:

We must admit to ourselves that even after Hanau, we have not managed to push back the shift to the right. On the contrary. This fascist avalanche appears more unstoppable today than ever. The danger has never been as great as it is today that a right-wing extremist party could reach central positions of power in Germany through democratic means.

He raised the question:

What have we done wrong that this party has become stronger and stronger in recent years? And what can we do to stop the coming catastrophe?

He pointed to the international dimension of the right-wing rise:

In the last few weeks we have experienced the fascistic escalation in the USA and especially in Minneapolis. Masked state

thug squads, raids and mass deportations, violence on the streets, and even murders by ICE, the American border police. And the AfD in Bavaria is already demanding a similar police group be set up here to tackle its so-called remigration programme. Today in Germany, and here in Hanau, we are experiencing deportations that leave us stunned. Deportations of people who have lived in Hanau for twenty years and longer. Is ICE, an increasingly brutal deportation machine, therefore a picture of the near future here in Germany?

In answering his question of how the coming catastrophe could be stopped, Çetin pointed to the resistance in the population, including in the USA. He said:

Tens of thousands of people have demonstrated against ICE in Minneapolis in the last few weeks in extreme sub-zero temperatures. There was the first general strike in the city for many decades.

He also recalled the protests and blockades recently in Giessen against the re-founding of a Hitler Youth by the AfD. And he concluded from this: “Resistance is possible and can be successful.”

Nevertheless, his words remained without a clear response. The anniversary differed significantly from the large events of all the years before, in which many thousands had participated. Above all, the official support of the city of Hanau was missing. A change, a rightward shift by the establishment parties, was clearly palpable here.

In fact, the city of Hanau had already explicitly and scandalously distanced itself from the “19 February Initiative” after the 5th anniversary. Some councillors demanded more “regard” and “respect” for the German authorities from the bereaved. In a joint statement on 25 February 2025, the Hanau Social Democratic Party (SPD), Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and Liberal Democratic Party (FDP) factions announced they would no longer support “such memorial events” in the future.

In particular, Emi? Gürbüz, Sedat’s mother, had incurred the wrath of the Hanau coalition. In her speech at last year’s memorial ceremony, she accused the city of Hanau of serious failures. In addition, words were attributed to her that she was alleged to have said at last year’s Berlinale at the premiere of the film *The German People (Das Deutsche Volk)*, but which demonstrably were never spoken in that way—namely, that she hated Germany and Hanau.

What she really said publicly was courageous and correct. At the Hanau

memorial event in 2025, in the presence of Hanau Mayor Claus Kaminsky and Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (both SPD), she described the ninefold murders as a “stain of shame in the history of the city of Hanau and Germany,” and said, “The city of Hanau bears responsibility for 19 February 2020; it is guilty.” These words are justified against the background of the findings to date.

Forensic Architecture, a multidisciplinary research group based at Goldsmiths, University of London, which uses architectural techniques and technologies to investigate cases of state violence and violations of human rights around the world, examined the circumstances at the Arena Bar in Kesselstadt, one of the two locations targeted by the killer. Its findings proved that the locking of the emergency exit, on police orders, had an absolutely devastating effect. Had it been open, the victims there could have saved themselves.

In addition, there had been numerous warning signals and indications regarding Tobias Rathjen, the fascist killer, who had drawn attention to himself with letters to the authorities, and who had posted an online statement with breathtaking genocidal fantasies. His father had also been known in the city as a racist for years, but nothing was done.

“If everyone had done their duty, these nine children would still be alive today,” Gürbüz said.

The Hanau councillors took her courageous words as an occasion to distance themselves from the “19 February Initiative,” and to accuse the victims.

Pascal Reddig, CDU faction chairman, accused Gürbüz of “instrumentalising the terrible act,” causing “division in a backward-looking manner.” In its statement, the coalition criticised Emi? Gürbüz’s speech as “political agitation” that “cannot be justified even by the terrible death of her son Sedat.” In future, there would be no more major commemorations in Hanau, they added.

The statement even went so far as to snidely point out Emi? Gürbüz’s naturalisation proceedings and to make this publicly known, which amounts to an illegal violation of privacy rights. In the city’s statement, which several media outlets quoted, the question was publicly raised why Gürbüz was “applying for German citizenship if she felt that way.”

This growing tendency to blame the victims clearly shows that the “fascist avalanche” cited by Çetin cannot be traced back to the AfD alone. Rather, all the establishment parties are increasingly adopting AfD policies, and thus opening the door to fascism. State governments of all stripes are enforcing the deportations, which Çetin rightly said “leave us stunned.” This also applies to the Left Party (*Die Linke*), which in Thuringia has implemented social cuts and deportations. As the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) wrote: “In Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow has left a trail of social devastation in his 10 years as minister-president, which has cleared the path for Höcke’s AfD.”

All the establishment parties support the federal government’s current pro-war policy and the Israeli genocide against the Palestinians. They all therefore see a potential danger of growing resistance in the working class and are trying to drive a wedge in the working class with nationalism. It is no coincidence that to this day the full circumstances of the Hanau murders have not been fully clarified, that official politics continues to adhere to the “lone perpetrator” theory and that city politics is increasingly distancing itself from the families of the Hanau victims.

Emi? Gürbüz declared last Saturday:

We owe it to you that those responsible are held to account. And we owe it to you to demand a society in which no one has to be afraid to be themselves. I wish for a world in which mothers do not lose their children to racism. A world in which diversity is not a threat, a world in which remembering takes place not only on anniversaries, but in action.

She promised to continue fighting “for justice, clarification and consequences,” and said:

The city of Hanau has still not accepted responsibility. What are they waiting for anyway? (...) In a time when a right-wing extremist government is a real danger, we say: “Never again” is now. We demand that those affected be listened to closely, and that they experience genuine solidarity.

Çetin Gültekin concluded. “We cannot give up and we will not give up.”

Again and again, it is rightly emphasised: *Say their names*, continue to remember their names—Kaloyan Velkov, Fatih Saraço?lu, Sedat Gürbüz, Vili Viorel P?un, Gökhan Gültekin, Mercedes Kierpacz, Ferhat Unvar, Hamza Kurtovi? and Said Nesar Hashemi—so that they do not fall into oblivion.

However, to truly prevent the return of fascism, it is even more important to call the political driving forces by their name and to show how the capitalist profit system leads to imperialist war, fascism and social misery. The pro-war policy of the bourgeoisie requires fascist methods, it requires social cruelties and it requires a nationalist division of the working class to paralyse resistance.

Therefore, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in its article “Six years after the racist murders in Hanau:”

To prevent the return of fascism, one must not rely on the state and its authorities, the police and the intelligence services, but must create independent, democratically controlled workers’ committees, some of which had already begun to emerge in the aftermath of the murders in Hanau.

To completely uncover how the murders came about and for the protection of all workers against the right-wing danger, it is important to understand who is a friend and who is an enemy. Workers’ allies are not the state representatives, union bureaucrats and party politicians in the Bundestag (federal parliament) and the municipalities, who have proven their indifference and hostility over the past six years.

Our allies are the workers all over the world who have taken up the fight against war and fascism.

To wage this fight, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, which belongs to the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), has founded the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). The objective foundations for the self-organisation of the working class are present. What is necessary is a new leadership and socialist, internationalist and historically conscious politics.

Write to us and participate in the implementation of this perspective!



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