

Neo-Nazi memorial service in Chemnitz, Germany

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On March 9, neo-Nazis hosted a formal memorial service for their deceased idol Thomas Haller at Chemnitz Stadium. The service was held during a football match. The fireworks ignited by fans in the stands also cast a bright light on the network of political relationships that has made possible the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has emphasised, right-wing extremists have to date relied not on a mass base in the population, but rather on their promotion by the establishment parties, the media and the state. This can clearly be seen in Chemnitz, where the right-wing scene has a hard core that is closely networked with the state and official politics.

At a home game in the stadium of the Chemnitz Football Club (CFC), three minutes of silence were observed for Haller, who recently died of cancer. Haller's picture appeared on the big stadium screen draped in black ribbons, music from the movie *Gladiator* sounded on the stadium loudspeakers and gigantic black banners were unfurled by fans commemorating "Tommy" in the old German gothic script beloved by the Nazis, as red fireworks were set off.

During the match, after scoring a goal, CFC striker Daniel Frahn held up a T-shirt with the words "Support your local Hools" [hooligans], which a CFC official had passed to him on the field. Nine days later, on March 18, some 1,000 right-wing extremists, including AfD and Pegida big wigs, took part in a funeral march for Haller's burial.

Who was Thomas Haller?

The neo-Nazi was a kind of institution among right-wing CFC fans at the stadium. He had contributed much to building a violently racist fascist scene since German reunification in 1990. He also ran a security business in close collaboration with Chemnitz celebrities, the City Council and the police.

In 2007, Haller boasted in the football magazine *RUND* that he had founded the organisation "HooNaRa" in the early 1990s. The name stands for "hooligans, Nazis, racists," which speaks for itself. Later, the right-wing organisations "Kaotic Chemnitz" and "NS Boys" emerged under Haller's leadership. "NS" officially stands for "New Society," but everyone knows it really means National Socialism (Nazism).

Despite this, the company, Haller Security, had been responsible for stewarding at the Chemnitz stadium for years.

Only after *RUND* interviewed CFC and The official reason given was "statements damaging to the club." Haller Security was also in charge of security for years at the Chemnitz City Festival and the Press Festival of the local newspaper *Freie Presse*.

Haller's name had also appeared in connection with the right-wing terrorist group National Socialist Underground (NSU), responsible for 10 murders. He was listed in the address book of Thomas Starke, the man who procured explosives and secured housing for the NSU terrorists.

As the Chemnitz *Freie Presse* wrote in an article ("Who was Thomas H?"), Haller was a friend of Ralf Marschner, the right-wing entrepreneur who had employed the NSU members Zschäpe, Böhnhardt and Mundlos at his companies. Haller's name was discovered in the mobile phone memory of Marschner. The Marschner Construction Service payroll included the names of several HooNaRa members, and Marschner himself referred to HooNaRa in a piece of music by his far-right rock band Westsachsengesocks.

In October 1999, the name Haller appeared in connection with the murder of Patrick Thümer. HooNaRa thugs had beaten the 17-year-old youth to death. Haller was himself accused but not convicted. Haller and Marschner were also investigated for obstructing justice because they had fabricated alibis for several of the youths involved in the death of the teenager.

Many of Haller's acquaintances, both Thomas Starke and Ralf Marschner, were at times confidential informants (CI) working for the police or secret service. Starke worked for the Berlin Federal Criminal Authority, Marschner as the CI "Primus" for the secret service. During the NSU trial, victims' lawyers complained that the HooNaRa connections of the NSU trio, who had gone to ground, had remained "virtually unilluminated." Apparently, the secret service held a protective hand over the organisation. It is quite possible that Haller was on the payroll of the German secret service.

In the aftermath of the neo-Nazi commemoration at the stadium, CFC officials have tried to distance themselves from the action. Insolvency administrator Klaus Siemon said by way of justification that the club had been coerced by right-wing extremists. He has been responsible for the club since it flirted with bankruptcy a year ago, following construction of a new

stadium. After the scandal surrounding the late Haller, Siemon filed criminal charges for “coercion and breach of the peace” against persons unknown.

However, there can be no talk of coercion in the run-up to the commemoration of Haller. On the day after the match, the CFC wrote, “It is a requirement of humanity to allow the CFC fans and those left behind, who had asked, to make possible the collective mourning.”

In fact, the club was fully involved in the planning of the event. The news website *Tag24* has a copy of a WhatsApp chat history in which the CEO of CFC, Thomas Uhlig, discusses with other employees, including fan representative Peggy Schellenberger (Social Democratic Party—SPD), the feasibility of the Haller commemoration. In the meantime, Uhlig, Schellenberger and others have been fired.

In the WhatsApp chat, Schellenberger, who also sits on the Chemnitz City Council for the SPD, is quoted as saying, “Tommy has more than earned it!!!” She describes Haller as a “reliable service provider, fan and friend,” and warns, “We have to respond well to media requests.”

As the *taz* newspaper reported, Schellenberger wrote on Facebook on the morning of the match in regard to Haller (in a now deleted post), “We were always fair, straight, apolitical and heartfelt with one another.”

No party, including the SPD, reported any problems in dealing with HooNaRa founder Haller. The Chemnitz City Council recently flatly rejected a motion submitted by the Pirate Party to change the contract with the CFC. According to the motion, any further funding should be linked to the association’s commitment to oppose right-wing extremism.

This open collaboration between official politics and right-wing extremist forces is particularly explosive when viewed in the context of the pogrom-like riots that took place in Chemnitz last August and September.

At almost the same time a thousand neo-Nazis were marching to Haller’s March 18 funeral in Chemnitz, the trial began in Dresden concerning the violent death of the German-Cuban Chemnitz resident Daniel Hillig, who was stabbed on the periphery of the city festival in August 2018. Right-wing extremist organisations, particularly the NS Boys and Kaotic Chemnitz, used this death as a pretext for days of racist violence during which they chased down foreigners and attacked a Jewish restaurant.

At the beginning of the trial in Dresden, defence lawyer Ricarda Lang requested that the case be dropped and the arrest warrant for the defendant, a Syrian refugee, lifted. Ricarda argued that there was a lack of tangible evidence; the time of the crime, the crime scene and motives were unclear; and the prosecution was characterised by “glaring inconsistencies.”

The lawyer also asked to see if the professional and lay judges who were to try the accused had ever participated in rallies organised by Pegida or the AfD, and what their attitude was towards refugees.

The basis for her fears was demonstrated by the fact that the mayor of Chemnitz, Barbara Ludwig (SPD), had demanded the conviction of the defendant on the eve of the trial despite the weak evidence. She said she hoped “there will be a conviction so that the relatives can find peace.” On the possibility of an acquittal, Ludwig said that “would be difficult for Chemnitz.”

In the same interview, she told the broadcaster Saxony-Fernsehen that in regard to the stadium scandal, she would be the first to offer the CFC support, so that it could improve its work “in dealing with fan culture.” She went on to remark that “right-wing structures had always existed in Chemnitz”

Saxony’s state premier, Michael Kretschmer (Christian Democratic Union—CDU), noted that the events at the stadium had shown “there is more involved than we thought.” Last autumn, after the riots in Chemnitz, Kretschmer was the first to publicly express doubt that the hunting down of refugees had ever happened.

Hans-Georg Maassen, the then-president of the secret service, openly expressed his solidarity with the right-wing rioters. In the *Bild* tabloid, he denied outright the hunting down of foreigners, despite videos on YouTube, and said he did not exclude “targeted misinformation.” In November 2018, Maassen was forced to retire.

The events surrounding the death of the neo-Nazi Haller underscore the fact that politicians of all the establishment parties, personalities from the worlds of big business and football, journalists and the secret service are all responsible for the return of fascism and the rise of the AfD. Right-wing extremists, racists and hooligans can act so openly only because they know they can rely on a right-wing network that reaches into the highest echelons of the government and the state.

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