

Germany: Right-wing terror in Erfurt

By Marianne Arens
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In the night of August 1, three men from Guinea were brutally attacked by neo-Nazis in Erfurt and had to be taken to hospital. One of them, a 21-year-old youth, suffered such severe head injuries that his condition was still considered “critical” days later; he is still in hospital.

It was in the early hours of the morning when the three happened to pass a neo-Nazi meeting place. They did not know that the “Neue Stärke Erfurt e.V.,” a martial arts club in a former shopping centre in the south of the city, had been occupied for five years by fascists from “Der III. Weg” (“The 3rd Way”) and used as a clubhouse. Several men standing around outside on that night attacked the three passers-by without any cause, beating and kicking them most brutally.

The police arrested 12 of them, but after a few hours, the violent perpetrators, all neo-Nazis known to the city authorities and the police, were free again. Senior Public Prosecutor Hannes Grünseisen, spokesman for Thuringia’s Public Prosecutor General’s Office, reported they were under investigation for committing “grievous bodily harm and breach of the peace.” However, since there was “no danger of a cover-up or of them fleeing,” there was “no reason for their detention.”

Witnesses are still being sought to clarify the exact course of events. The injured victims, whose death the Nazi thugs had accepted, are apparently out of the question as witnesses.

The attack is only the tip of an iceberg. In Erfurt, right-wing gangs of thugs can act completely freely and uninhibitedly under the eyes of the state authorities. This is what happened just a few days earlier, on July 18, when masked right-wing extremists attacked a group of young people celebrating in front of the state chancellery, where surveillance cameras record everything, day and night. At least five of the 12 or so

attacked, including young women, were left lying on the floor, some of them seriously injured. As in the case of the Guineans, the Thuringian State Criminal Office (LKA) quickly took over the investigation—and apparently, let it fizzle out.

Last Saturday, about 400 protested in an Erfurt demonstration against racism, right-wing violence and its cover-up by the state. A spokeswoman for the Thuringian Ezra victim advisory service, Christin Fiedler, described the attack in front of the state chancellery:

“This was not a ‘mass brawl’ or ‘confrontation,’ but a targeted, coordinated and insidious attack on people celebrating peacefully by right-wing violent criminals, presumably experienced in martial arts. The perpetrators were partially masked and knew exactly what they were doing. They acted without restraint and with enormous brutality and knowingly accepted causing possible fatal injuries, for example by continuing to kick people who were lying unconscious on the ground.”

For Fiedler, the fact that the attack took place in public, with video monitoring directly in front of the building of the Thuringia state government shows “how secure the perpetrators felt, who did not even stop when the police were already on the scene.”

The fascist attacks in Erfurt are part of a wave of right-wing extremist and anti-Semitic violence. These have increased considerably in Germany. Even the federal Interior Minister, Horst Seehofer, had to admit this when he spoke of a “long trail of blood” in May, when presenting the police crime statistics, which leads from the actions of the neo-fascist NSU, responsible for a series of xenophobic murders, to the attacks in Munich, Halle and Hanau, to the murder of Kassel’s district president Walter Lübcke. Seehofer said, “The greatest threat in our country comes from the right.”

But the neo-Nazis and anti-Semites have no mass

support among the population, unlike the 1930s. The majority hates and despises right-wing extremism and expresses this again and again—sometimes in mass demonstrations. The fascists only feel so strong because they know that the “state within the state”—the dark channels and neo-Nazi networks in the police, the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) and the secret service—are at their side. That is why Erfurt’s well-known neo-Nazis, who are prepared to use violence, are again at large in the city, even though they have just beaten three Guineans half to death.

The decision to let them roam free evinces such open support for the right-wingers that Thuringia state interior minister Georg Maier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) felt compelled to publicly criticise it. “The Nazi thugs of Erfurt are all walking free again,” Maier tweeted. “I know it’s not my place to criticise the justice system, but it’s a disaster for the victims and the people of Herrenberg.” Herrenberg is the housing estate where the attack took place.

Like Seehofer, Maier is trying to cover his tracks. The federal interior minister showed his solidarity with radical right-wing protests in Chemnitz in September 2018, among other things. Maier is part of a state government in Thuringia, which is led by a state premier from the Left Party, Bodo Ramelow, and which courts the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and seeks to cooperate with it. This was demonstrated only a few hours after Ramelow’s re-election in the spring.

On March 6, Ramelow used his casting vote to help the AfD take over the vice presidency of the Thuringia state legislature. Ramelow then explicitly stated on Twitter that he had “very fundamentally decided to use my vote to clear the way for parliamentary participation, which must be granted to every parliamentary group.”

The Left Party, for which many voters had only cast their ballot because they wanted to set an example against the right wing, thus very consciously ensured the AfD’s “parliamentary participation”—a party that plays down Nazism, fans racism and, especially in Thuringia, has open neo-Nazis in its ranks. It is precisely this policy of the Left Party and the SPD that strengthens and encourages the extreme right-wing gangs of thugs. The SPD interior minister is only concerned because the effects of the right-wing policies

of the Ramelow government are visible. He is not taking any action in the matter, despite the public prosecutor’s office being part of his department.

Nazi parties such as “Die Rechte” (“The Right”) and “Der III. Weg” have been explicitly allowed to use the building in Erfurt-South, where the Guineans were attacked, as a clubhouse for five years. Undisturbed by the authorities, they organize right-wing rock concerts, martial arts training, and party meetings there. Enrico Biczysko, is a right-wing figurehead in Erfurt’s city council for the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany, and the neo-Nazis have friends and supporters in the judiciary and police.

The first police press release after the attack was already characteristic for this right-wing swamp. In officialese, it blandly states, “On 01.08.2020 at about 03:05, a verbal dispute between a group of three foreign fellow citizens and about 10 Germans occurred, which culminated in a physical confrontation. In the course of this quarrel, two persons with a migration background were injured, some of them seriously.” The cynicism of this police communication can hardly be surpassed. Through their presence in Germany, the Guineans had put themselves in danger and ultimately brought about their own injuries.

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