

Germany: Right-wing extremist network in police pays homage to Hitler and the Nazis

By Jan Ritter
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The right-wing extremist networks in the German police are even more extensive than was previously known. On Wednesday, September 16, 34 stations and private homes in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) were searched by police officers at around 6 a.m. Over 200 investigators searched buildings in Essen, Duisburg, Moers, Mülheim an der Ruhr, Selm and Oberhausen.

Two weeks earlier, on September 3, investigators had accidentally come across racist and right-wing extremist material on the private mobile phone of a 32-year-old police officer from Essen. They were originally investigating his colleague on suspicion of betraying official secrets to journalists.

According to the police, the racist and right-wing extremist material found meets the offence of using “symbols of anti-constitutional organisations” and of “hate speech.” At least 126 “criminally relevant” pictures were seized, the content of which is inadequately described as agitating against refugees, fascist filth, and the trivialisation of the Nazis.

As *Zeit Online* reports, one photo montage shows a grinning SS soldier pressing a button marked “Gas.” In the background, refugees are screaming in fear in a gas chamber. Another racist montage also promotes the systematic extermination of people of other skin colours or ethnicities. A man on a bicycle aims a pistol at a black child who is trying to escape from him. Below the picture is written: “When the charcoal runs away while barbecuing.”

Another depiction shows an American policeman. “I like to shoot cans. Pepsi cans, Coke cans, Africans,” he says. Here, Africans are dehumanised with a cheap pun, declared to be objects, and shooting at them equated with target practice using beverage cans. In addition to this racist agitation, numerous other pictures were found showing Hitler, the Hitler salute, swastikas, and Reich war flags, among other things.

The right-wing extremist material comes from at least five chat groups. All 29 members of these chat groups are police officers from NRW and are aged between their mid-20s and mid-50s. According to the police, investigations have been launched against 11 members of the chat groups, as they are said to be solely responsible for spreading the agitation. All other members have merely been suspended and 14 of them are to be removed from active duty. Twenty-five of the officers are under the authority of the Essen police headquarters and performed their duties in a service group for the Mülheim an der Ruhr protection police, whose leader is also a member of the chat groups.

However, the network does not only extend to the constabulary in Mülheim an der Ruhr or the area controlled by the Essen police headquarters. One member works at the NRW State Office for Criminal Investigation, another member at the State Office for

Training, Further Training and Personnel Affairs (LAFP), and two officers are employed at the State Office for Central Police Services (LZPD) in Duisburg.

The fact that members of the chat groups belong to all three higher state authorities of the police in North Rhine-Westphalia very clearly shows the extent of the networking of right-wing extremists within the police. The LAFP is, among other things, responsible for the initial and further training of special police units in NRW as well as in other federal states, and the LZPD supports the coordination of forces and operations in special situations and with the necessary special equipment. Thus, the network had access to central bodies of the police in NRW.

The first chat group was established in 2012; the group with the most pictures has been active since March 2015, and the last documented message was sent on August 27, 2020. As the investigations and findings so far are based solely on the analysis of a mobile phone found by chance, the network uncovered is only the tip of the iceberg. Many more mobile phones were confiscated during the raids last Wednesday.

The lie about “isolated cases”

At a press conference hastily convened after the searches, North Rhine-Westphalia’s Interior Minister Herbert Reul (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) was busy trying to distract attention from the comprehensive right-wing extremist structures of the police authority under his jurisdiction. He spoke of a “disgrace for the NRW police force” and regretted that the accusations “hit the police to the core.” He was “shocked” and “appalled.”

This is the height of hypocrisy. Reul is well informed about the extreme right-wing structures in the police and is working systematically to cover up their true extent. In response to recent revelations, he has installed a special representative for right-wing extremist tendencies in the NRW police force. Uwe Reichel-Offermann, previously deputy head of the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution (as the secret service is called), which is subordinate to Reul, now reports personally to him, giving him full control over the results of the investigation.

At the beginning of the year, Reul had already ordered the appointment of decentralised ombudsmen in all police headquarters as contact persons for reporting “anti-constitutional” suspicious activity following the disclosure of several right-wing extremist incidents in the NRW police force. Significantly, Silvia Richter, wife of the police commissioner, took over the post in Essen. Reul had also spoken out against conducting comprehensive studies regarding right-wing tendencies within the police force.

At that time, as reported in *Der Spiegel*, racist pictures and images of imperial eagles and swastikas were being spread in chat groups by officers of the Aachen-West police station, among others. At a demonstration in Duisburg, a police car with a sticker of the right-wing extremist Identity Movement attracted attention. “Fight back! It’s your country!” could be seen written on the police car. Also, Thorsten W., a suspected collaborator of the “Gruppe S.” terrorist cell, worked for the traffic commissioner’s office in Hamm, where his right-wing extremist sentiments were well known among colleagues.

The right-wing extremist activities in NRW are part of a comprehensive neo-Nazi network that has formed within the security apparatus and the army and is behaving increasingly aggressively. According to the *Tagesspiegel*, there have been over 170 incidents of a “racist or right-wing extremist nature in the police force” in the last five years, according to official figures. In Berlin, more than 80 cases have been initiated against police officers since 2017. This year alone, numerous new cases have come to light.

In Baden-Württemberg, seven police students were suspended because it became known they had made nationalist, anti-Semitic and misogynist statements, as reported by the magazine *Der Spiegel*. More than 40 active and former Munich police officers exchanged anti-Semitic messages in a chat group.

In the Frankfurt “Itiotentreff,” a chat group which included five officers and a colleague from the 1st precinct, numerous right-wing extremist messages and more than 100 pictures were shared. The members of the group made fun of disabled people, concentration camp prisoners, dark-skinned people, refugees and Jews. Particularly inhumane posts were news items showing the Syrian refugee boy Alan Kurdi, whose picture became sadly famous in 2015. “Whoever finds him, may keep him,” was written under the picture of his lifeless body, washed up on a beach in Turkey.

On July 23, *Die Zeit* published an article online, under the headline “Soldiers planning a coup,” revealing excerpts from the nationwide radical right-wing Telegram group #WIR. Among the more than 240 members, at times, of the chat group were “several soldiers, reservists and veterans” of the Bundeswehr (armed forces), including numerous right-wing extremists and neo-Nazis, writes author and right-wing extremism expert Christian Fuchs.

The right-wing extremists are networked nationwide and planned the assassination of left-wingers and the establishment of a fascist regime in Germany on a “Day X.” In the case of Group S., they had been hoarding weapons and ammunition for a concerted “commando” action against mosques and Muslims.

In several German states, data were retrieved from police computers and the personal information subsequently used in right-wing extremist, threatening emails. In the best-known case, the private address of Seda Basay-Yildiz was retrieved via a Hesse police computer in the 1st precinct in Frankfurt. A few days later, the lawyer, who had defended relatives of victims of the neo-Nazi “National Socialist Underground” (NSU), among others, received a threatening letter signed “NSU 2.0.”

The promotion of right-wing extremist structures in the state apparatus

The reason why neo-Nazis can act so provocatively is that no one in the entire political establishment—among the parties, the investigating authorities and the judiciary—seriously opposes them. On the contrary, the spread of right-wing extremist terrorist networks in the army,

police and secret services is part of the sharp rightward turn of the ruling class as a whole.

This is evident not only at federal level, where the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats adopts the policies and programme of the fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD) on all central issues, but also at state level. In NRW, Reul and the Christian Democrat-Free Democrat state government stand for a strict “law-and-order” policy and systematically strengthen the extreme right-wing structures in the state apparatus to take action against the growing left-wing opposition.

Under Reul’s leadership, a regime of “zero tolerance” was established in the Essen police force. As reported by *Zeit Online*, he had issued the slogan in the Ruhr metropolis, “to take tough action against the criminal machinations of some Lebanese extended families.” Since then, shisha bars, for example, have been under constant surveillance. This policy deliberately promotes racist and right-wing extremist tendencies within and outside the police. In February, an extreme right-wing terrorist committed a massacre at two shisha bars in Hanau and shot nine people.

While the ruling class protects the extreme right-wing networks and allows them to operate despite their bloody terror, it is waging a war against the left. In November 2018, Reul presented a strategy paper titled “Secret Service of the Future.” According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, he demands that “instead of ‘narrowing its gaze to violent extremist actors,’ the Office for the Protection of the Constitution must once again monitor nonviolent groups more closely.”

He justifies this by saying organisations that are not violent themselves form the “environment of political violence,” “the political breeding ground, the so-called sympathiser scene.” He refers to the protests in the Hambach Forest, where environmentalists are opposing large-scale deforestation to enable opencast lignite mining. Reul had the protest camp cleared in September 2018 using a massive police intervention. The accusation that political opposition endangers the state and creates a breeding ground for political violence is part of the standard repertoire of every totalitarian dictatorship.

Like the entire ruling class, Reul fears that the growing outrage over social inequality, militarism and the increasing of state powers will come together with an anti-capitalist, socialist programme. That is why he wants the Secret Service not to “narrow” its view to violent actors (who are often infiltrated by the secret services), but to monitor, intimidate and suppress legal political organisations. The radical right-wing terrorist networks play a central role in this strategy.

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