

Hysterical anti-refugee and anti-immigrant agitation after Mannheim knife attack

Marianne Arens
6 June 2024

Since the May 31 knife attack at Mannheim's market square, in which a police officer was killed, the Islamophobic media campaign in Germany has continued unabated. Leading establishment party politicians, above all the former Left Party leader Sahra Wagenknecht, are falling over themselves in their hysterical rants against Muslims, calling for an "end to tolerance" and merciless deportations, including to Afghanistan. Shortly before the European elections, they are doing everything they can to poison the climate in Germany and move it to the right.

On Friday, May 31, a young Afghan man attacked a rally organised by the Islamophobic Bürgerbewegung Pax Europa (Pax Europa Citizens Movement, BPE) with a knife. A police officer who intervened was so seriously injured that he died two days later, and several participants were also injured, some seriously.

The attacker, who was struck down by police gunfire, is still in hospital six days after the incident and is unresponsive. The 25-year-old Sulaiman A. had fled to Germany from Afghanistan with his brother 10 years ago. He is now married, has two children and lives in Heppenheim, Hesse. He had completed his secondary school leaving certificate and actively supported refugee aid. He repeatedly took on jobs as a labourer, but was unable to get a permanent job, not least because the immigration office refused him a permanent residence permit despite his marriage to a German woman.

According to his neighbours, Sulaiman A. had recently become radicalised before he attacked Michael Stürzenberger, the chairman of the BPE, and several of his supporters on Friday, fatally injuring a police officer.

The way in which this case has since been exploited politically is unprecedented. Top politicians are calling for harsher punishments and deportations, including to Afghanistan and Syria. Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democrat, SPD) described the attack on a police officer as an "attack on us all," and Finance Minister Christian Lindner (Liberal Democrat, FDP) promised to better equip the security authorities financially. "No more false tolerance!" shouted Lindner. The Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) called for a debate in the Bundestag (federal parliament) with the aim of "better protecting" the police and examining the possibility of

deportations to Afghanistan.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser announced tough penalties:

"The perpetrator must be punished with the maximum severity of the law for his murderous act," said the SPD politician. The security authorities had "the Islamist scene firmly in their sights." On Tuesday, Faeser went one step further and emphasised: "It is clear to me that people who pose a potential threat to Germany's security must be deported quickly. ... Germany's security interests clearly outweigh the interests of those affected to stay."

Sahra Wagenknecht, who now heads the BSW split from the Left Party, made particularly nationalist and repulsive remarks. In the style of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), Wagenknecht ranted in an election campaign video about the "serious problem with failed integration: there are solidifying Islamist parallel societies." The situation had "worsened due to non-integrated immigration," she said.

Wagenknecht indirectly denounced the Mannheim perpetrator as a social parasite who had "received benefits for ten years." Basically, "anyone who can halfway pronounce the word 'asylum' can come to Germany." She called for a "U-turn in asylum and immigration policy" and described it as "urgently necessary" for asylum procedures to be carried out "at Europe's external borders or in third countries." She also called for "consistent deportations," which should "naturally" also take place to Afghanistan.

Wagenknecht's words are exemplary of the hysteria of government and opposition politicians, who are no different from the fascists of the AfD. The intensity and omnipresence with which they express their anti-migrant agitation indicates how important it is to them. In the face of rearmament, escalating war and the associated social cuts, the dissatisfied working class is to be divided, incited and thus paralysed.

The background to the events in Mannheim is consistently ignored.

Michael Stürzenberger, the first victim of Friday's attack, is a right-wing, Islamophobic activist. The journalist and former CSU press spokesman has distinguished himself as a pioneer of the far-right PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident). He has journeyed throughout the country as a travelling preacher of hate propaganda with the

aim of driving Muslims out of Germany. His current organisation, the Bürgerbewegung Pax Europa, was originally founded by Udo Ulfkotte, another far-right journalist who spread his Islamophobic filth and conspiracy-theories through the Kopp publishing house.

A rally by these Islamophobic agitators on Mannheim's market square, of all places, was an unscrupulous provocation. The market square in the centre of Mannheim is located in an area where immigrants predominantly live. It is surrounded by numerous Turkish and other international restaurants, bakeries and fruit and vegetable shops.

Here, long-established Mannheim residents live peacefully together with workers of foreign origin. This is also where the large Mannheim demonstration against the genocide in the Gaza Strip took place on February 24, and many residents of the neighbourhood, whether German or immigrant, actively supported the demonstration.

There have also been repeated demonstrations here against brutal police violence. Recently, a striking number of such cases have ended fatally, but the police almost always face no consequences. In the last two years alone, there have been at least four cases of police violence resulting in death in Mannheim.

Time and again, the perpetrators in uniform have attacked the mentally ill, especially those of foreign origin. On May 2, 2022, for example, several officers killed 47-year-old Ante P., who was in a state of mental crisis. They threw him to the ground, pinned him down and hit him in the head with full force. Those responsible were acquitted at the beginning of March 2024.

On December 23, 2023, police officers shot Ertekin Ö., who was also mentally ill. They were acquitted by the court on May 29, just two days before the latest knife attack. Ertekin Ö.'s family reacted to the acquittal saying they were "shaken and shocked," and the "May 2 Initiative" group announced a rally for June 1.

The rally against police violence was cancelled until further notice due to the recent events on the market square. Meanwhile, the injured Pax Europa functionary Stürzenberger has reported back from hospital. He publicly compared himself to the Dutch film director Theo van Gogh, who was murdered in Amsterdam in 2004.

At the time, Theo van Gogh had launched unremitting provocations against Islam and, among other things, projected Koranic verses onto naked female bodies. His death took place, as the WSWS wrote at the time, in "a climate of increasing xenophobia on the part of the establishment parties and a large part of the media. ... With his provocative attacks on Islam, van Gogh threw fuel on the fire."

Those in power reacted to van Gogh's murder by expanding police-state measures and tightening deportation and isolation policies. Geert Wilders, the strong man behind the future Dutch government, has based his party partly on the legacy of Theo

van Gogh and has even denounced the Koran as a "fascist book."

In Germany, the AfD youth organisation Junge Alternative reacted to the knife attack on the market square by calling for a rally at the scene of the crime in Mannheim under the slogan: "Remigration would have prevented this crime," provocatively quoting the core message of the Potsdam meeting that triggered mass rallies against the AfD a few months ago.

However, hardly any establishment politicians or major newspapers has reacted to this latest provocation. Instead, just a few days before the European elections, they are joining in with the right-wing incitement against immigrants and thus strengthening the AfD. They are once again showing that their lip service "opposition" to right-wing extremism is nothing but propaganda. In reality, they are putting the AfD's programme into practice and promoting the party. They are using it to intimidate opposition to war, the genocide in Gaza and social cuts and to build a police state.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) has placed the fight against war at the centre of its European election campaign. It stands for the unity of the European and international working class in the fight against war and capitalism and for a socialist programme.

The SGP calls on workers to defend their Muslim colleagues. In its election appeal for the European elections, it writes:

In order to suppress the growing opposition to this hated policy, the coalition government is donning the moth-eaten garb of fascism. It is inciting hatred against refugees and immigrants and abolishing basic democratic rights.

The SGP defends basic democratic rights and demands equal rights for immigrants and refugees.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact