

Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (German Trade Union Confederation)
Florian Gersten

Speech to commemorate the anniversary of the Oktoberfest bomb attack 1980

Never again! This is a maxim that we, as the Trade Union Youth Organisation, have endorsed since 1945. Right-wing ideas did not, after all, suddenly cease to exist at the end of the war, even if many used to claim that they had.

The sad truth is, however, in 1980 and even today, right-wing networks and structures existed and continue to exist in Germany, in Bavaria and in Munich. The fight against right-wing terror is still highly relevant. And that is why we are standing here today to commemorate the dead and injured of the Oktoberfest bomb attack.

We already took part in the city's commemorative event in 1981. Since 1982 we have been involved in its organisation and, from 1983 onwards, have taken the responsibility to ensure that an act of remembrance has been held every year since then on this site. We stood here come rain or shine, sometimes together with just a handful of people. But we were here, unlike many of our politicians. In these 40 years since we have been organising the commemorative event, only once was it attended by a President of Germany, only once by a Minister President and only once by a Bavarian Minister of the Interior. The Bavarian Minister President is not here today either. From our point of view an absolute 'no go', as remembrance is no less important just because, this year, no television cameras are focussed on us for a live broadcast, Germany-wide.

But who are we, standing here today, upholding this commemorative event? My name is Florian Gersten; I am 24 years old and active in the EVG-Jugend (Railway and Transport Union Youth Organisation) and the DGB-Jugend (Trade Union Youth Organisation) as a voluntary member. I was born and grew up in Munich. I went to school here, did my training here, was often at the 'Wiesn', often walked past and didn't know what had happened here.

It was only through my voluntary work in the trade union that I learned about what happened in 1980. Through the Trade Union Youth Organisation I learned about the bomb attack, about the right-wing background behind the act and about the annual commemorative event. And that is precisely why it is important for me to stand here today so that all young people can learn about what happened here in the future as well.

Then there is the question: why the Trade Union Youth Organisation of all people, why us? Of course, first and foremost, because of our historical responsibility as anti-fascists, because of the maxim 'never again' already mentioned. But also because we are young people, because we have a future ahead of us – and because we want a future in which every person has equal rights, irrespective of their sexual orientation, identity, skin colour or anything else.

And the Oktoberfest bomb attack was precisely an attack against this. A political act aimed at driving a wedge into society and at boosting right-wing forces – right-wing forces that not only do not recognise but actively want to fight this very banal ideal that all people are equal.

It is the struggle against this ideology that compels us to come here every year. And, unfortunately, it is a constant struggle, as a brief look at Munich's history since the Oktoberfest bomb attack in 1980 alone shows:

There have been 6 attacks and attempts on people's lives in this city alone since the Oktoberfest bomb attack. 12 people have lost their lives; even more have been injured. The last major attack was just 6 years ago. So when people have approached us over the past 40 years and told us that 'everything's fine now' – we have pointed out that, incredulously, at no time has it been long since the last right-wing terror attack in Munich.

It was never 'fine', unfortunately, it has never been 'over'.
And that is why we will continue to come here.

Yes, the Oktoberfest bomb attack has finally been recognised as an act of right-wing terrorism. But that is not the end of right-wing terrorism in Munich. And it doesn't help all those affected in their own struggles to seek clarification. With this commemorative event we can and want to give these other struggles a platform, as it has always been one of its supportive pillars to look at the wider picture and to see the Oktoberfest bomb attack for what it is: part of a – sadly – larger landscape of right-wing networks and terror organisations in Munich and way beyond.

The commemorative event here can also only be seen as one piece in the puzzle in our effort to make young people aware of what happened here.

At long last, a documentation site was created here on the site of the bomb attack two years ago that explains the background to interested people. And it is a good and important thing that it exists – once again we would like to thank the City of Munich specifically for this.

However, it must also be said that this documentation site should only be seen as one piece in the puzzle as not every young person comes regularly to Munich, let alone walks past here.

For this reason we continue to fight for the Oktoberfest bomb attack to be included at last in Bavarian curricula. School children should learn what happened here; they should learn about right-wing terrorism, right-wing networks and also about the suffering of those who have survived. For us, this would be the next most important piece in the puzzle in the struggle for a dignified form of commemoration and remembrance – not only by idealists but by the entire population.

Another pillar as to why we always have been, are and will continue to be here today was and is that we want to give those affected the possibility of telling their stories and airing their problems publicly. And while the recognition that this was a right-wing terror attack may perhaps have brought a little peace of mind to some of those who have fought for clarification, it does not represent the end of all problems.

As an example, it was only last year that a survivor of the Oktoberfest bomb attack had to fight in court for recognition of the injuries caused by the attack. After more than 40 years; after more than four decades of undignified fighting for every attestation, every doctor's certificate. And that is only one aspect: the struggle for money and against the threat of poverty in old age as a direct consequence of the bomb attack. And the fact that people and their stories are degraded to numbers in all discussions about compensation is one that is not to be neglected either.

For there is one thing we must not forget: behind every person affected is a biography that was unwittingly changed in one fell swoop.

Not only behind those who died, but also behind the countless people injured and traumatised. Behind the families who were also affected by this act of terrorism, even if they themselves were not directly injured. There is a popular saying that one death is a misfortune, 10 deaths a tragedy ... and 100 deaths a statistic.

And that is why we want to fight together for a culture of remembrance that gives each victim and the deceased a face, a name, a biography. It also means that we will endeavour, finally, to look in more detail at the life histories of those who died. We know far too little about them – but we want to know who these people were so that we can continue to remember them with dignity.

And we want to name their names. It should not be that we, too, refer to them as ‘the 12 dead’, as a statistic.

For this reason we remember:

- Gabriele Deutsch (she was 17 years old)
- Robert Gmeinwieser (he was 17 years old)
- Axel Hirsch (he was 23 years old)
- Markus Hölzl (he was 44 years old)
- Paul Lux (he was 52 years old)
- Ignatz Platzer (he was 6 years old)
- Ilona Platzer (she was 8 years old)
- Franz Schiele (he was 33 years old)
- Angela Schüttrigkeit (she was 39 years old)
- Errol Vere-Hodge (he was 25 years old)
- Ernst Vestner (he was 30 years old)
- Beate Werner (she was 11 years old)