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Arson Attack on Turkish Families in Mölln (November 24, 1992)

In September 1991 right-wing extremists attacked housing facilities for asylum seekers in the Saxon city of Hoyerswerda. The attacks were the prelude to a wave of xenophobic violence that spread through Germany in the early 1990s, rearing its ugly head in both East and West alike. Violence against foreigners claimed seventeen lives in 1992, including those of two Turkish women and a Turkish girl killed in an arson attack in Mölln, a small town in Schleswig-Holstein. An account of the attack follows. After Mölln, the violence continued: in May 1993, skinheads in the city of Solingen in North Rhine-Westphalia set fire to the home of a Turkish family, killing five of its members, among them three children.

“My Children are Burning!”

For three people, there was no escape after the arson attack in Mölln

Someone left flowers, dark red carnations and white daisies. Loosely bundled, they are leaning against what used to be a window display. Until two years ago a Turkish grocery store was located here, after that, just residential housing. Now the glass from the display window is shattered, and a shovel, broom, and debris lie in front of the building. Two large black leather bags, probably from the criminal police, sit next to the soot-blackened entrance. Two firefighters in a gondola attached to the end of an extended aerial ladder hover above the building's roof truss, which has been stripped of its tiles and blackened by the smoke.

This is house number nine on Mühlenstrasse in Mölln, a pastel-colored brick building. It is located right in the center of this tiny city, which, with its red brick buildings and cobbled streets, would make a thoroughly suitable decal of a German provincial idyll, and which chose a fitting patron for itself in the figure of Till Eulenspiegel.* It is only a couple hundred steps from Mühlenstrasse to Hauptstrasse, the main street, which is already decorated for Christmas, and to the market square.

An extended Turkish family by the name of Arslan, which included about 25 members at last count, lived at Mühlenstrasse no. 9 for more than twenty years – until Sunday night. “They were always very nice and courteous,” said Erika Fröhlich, a seventy-year-old neighbor. “We never had any trouble with them – on the contrary.” The Turkish neighbors helped the disabled elderly lady by shoveling snow, for example. That’s why Erika Fröhlich and other neighbors can’t fathom

* Till Eulenspiegel is a famous character from German folklore – eds.

the crime committed against the residents of Mühlenstrasse no. 9. “This hate has got to stop,” she said.

On Sunday night, alleged right-wing extremists committed an unprecedented arson attack in the middle of Mölln, first on the building at Ratzeburger Strasse no. 13, where eight Turkish and Kurdish families – a total of 43 people – live, and then, half an hour later, at Mühlenstrasse no. 9. [That night] sobbing and frightened women and men stood at the windows of the two flaming buildings; others converged on the street.

Outside on Mühlenstrasse, young men carried blankets over [to the house], stretched them out and encouraged the people trapped on the upper floors to jump. Many did and were able to save themselves that way, albeit some with injuries. Others were rescued in different ways. Children were tossed into the blankets as well, and thus managed to avoid peril. “A woman standing on the top floor was screaming ‘My children are burning,’” reported nineteen-year-old Mustafa, a young man from the neighborhood, who had run over to Mühlenstrasse no. 9 in his pajamas. For three people – two women, fifty-one and twenty years old, and a ten-year-old girl – all help came too late. The fifty-one-year-old was the matriarch of the Arslan family; she had lived in Mölln for two decades. The child, her granddaughter Gillis, was born on Mühlenstrasse, and the twenty-year-old was visiting from Turkey.

Mölln’s population of approximately 17,000 presently includes 150 Turkish families, about 700 people. Young Turkish men regularly get together at a tea house in the Old Town, just as they did this Monday. They sat there at tables, their expressions grim; a whole group of them had experienced the horrific incident as rescuers. The mayor had been there that morning and had spoken with those present about how to help the now homeless residents of the burned-out buildings.

Around noon, a young man came running and announced that a demonstration had formed on the main street. Students at the vocational school had spontaneously decided to end their instruction early and register their protest. Not everyone participated, but more than 200 turned out and marched silently through the city in the drizzling rain. “Will German history repeat itself?” read one hastily made cardboard poster. The protest march grew to about five hundred; passersby joined the marchers, including some of the numerous out-of-town journalists, as well as Ute Erdsiek-Rave (SPD), president of the Schleswig-Holstein state parliament, who had rushed there from Kiel. She, too, was visibly shocked by the crime, the perpetrators of which are still unknown. Only one neighbor of the family on Ratzeburger Strasse was able to report that he had heard the screeching tires of car taking off shortly before the fire broke out.

Source: Klaus Brill, “My Children are Burning!” [“Meine Kinder, die verbrennen”], *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 24, 1992.

Translation: Allison Brown