

# Neo-Nazi murders in Germany: What role did the intelligence agencies play?

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Every passing day brings new revelations confirming that the murder rampage carried out by the neo-Nazi organization “National Socialist Underground” (NSU) would have been impossible without the active support of the German secret services.

The three members of the NSU, Uwe Mundlos, Uwe Böhnhardt and Beate Zschäpe, went underground in 1998 and were able to live undisturbed in eastern Germany until November last year. Between 2000 and 2007 they killed nine foreign workers and a police officer, carried out three bomb attacks and raided 14 banks—apparently under the noses of, or with the assistance of, the various federal and state secret service agencies.

The question is ever more sharply posed: What political and organizational role was played by the intelligence community, especially the Thuringia State Office for the Protection of the Constitution (LfV), as the state secret service is called?

This issue was notably not raised at the parliamentary committee of inquiry held in the eastern German state of Thuringia earlier this week. The inquiry heard testimony from several key figures, including the former Thuringia LfV president Helmut Roewer, but the conclusion drawn by the media and in political circles was merely that “chaos reigned” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*).

In fact, what appeared as chaotic and eccentric behaviour by intelligence agents had a definite political content. Under Roewer’s presidency from 1994 to 2000, the LfV made available considerable sums of money to assist the neo-Nazi scene and the NSU in the state.

Nobody at the inquiry asked how it was possible for Roewer, a former army tank commander, to take over the Thuringia LfV in 1994. At the inquiry, Roewer even claimed he had received his certificate of appointment from a stranger in a bar when he was drunk.

The state of Thuringia had been governed since 1992 by a coalition of social democrats and conservatives led by Bernhard Vogel (Christian Democratic Union—CDU). Previously, Vogel had been the long-time premier of the West German state of Rhineland-Palatinate. His interior minister was initially Franz Schuster (CDU), followed by Richard Dewes (Social Democratic Party—SPD) towards the end of 1994.

Roewer came as an undersecretary from the Interior Ministry run by Manfred Kanther (CDU). Kanther had grown up in Thuringia, and in 1957 fled to Hesse in West Germany. He was associated with the right wing of the CDU. In the state of Hesse, the CDU has traditionally distinguished itself by its anti-communism and extreme right-wing positions.

Roewer, who at the time was a member of the free market Free Democratic Party (FDP), writes today for the extreme right-wing Austrian publisher Ares-Verlag. But even in the early 1990s he made

no secret of his right-wing inclinations. A photo has been circulated in the German press showing the reigning domestic intelligence chief in 1999 at a Weimar cultural festival dressed in the costume of General Ludendorff, who participated in the Munich coup in 1923 alongside Adolf Hitler.

In the anti-communist euphoria that followed the collapse of Stalinist East Germany, even the most right-wing elements could apparently assume the highest state offices. A man such as Roewer, accordingly, was given control of the Thuringia intelligence service, where he operated without oversight and—contrary to the rules—undertook as department head to personally direct undercover agents active in building up the neo-fascist milieu in the state.

Roewer was forced to quit office in 2000 following irregularities in connection with the payment of his undercover agents, his creation of phony cover companies and the unmasking of one of his spies within the extreme right-wing milieu.

Roewer owed his six-year career at the top of the Thuringia intelligence agency to state premier Vogel, who personally signed his certificate of appointment; state Interior Minister Schuster, who proposed him; Secretary of State Michael Lippert, who protected him; and the social democratic state Interior Minister Dewes, who gave him a free hand and still stresses their close collaboration.

Dewes told the parliamentary committee of investigation that he had only heard the names Zschäpe, Mundlos and Böhnhardt “after the action in Eisenach”, i.e., on November 4, 2011. And he had not engaged with intelligence sources.

Dirk Adams, who represents the Green Party in the NSU committee, told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: “There has been virtually no control. Roewer shut it down because he was very close to the then-interior minister [Schuster].”

Under Roewer, vast sums of money flowed to the neo-Nazis. With Tino Brandt and Dienel, the intelligence agencies had the two most important neo-Nazis in Thuringia on their payroll.

Tino Brandt was an undercover agent of the Thuringia LfV from 1994 to 2004. During this period he received \$200,000 from the secret service, which he claims was used to build up the right-wing organization “Thuringia Homeland Security”, in which the Zwickau killer trio Mundlos, Zschäpe and Böhnhardt were involved. The head at the time of the Thuringia section of the Nazi music network “Blood and Honour”, Marcel Dienel, received 25,000 deutsche marks, with which he financed the right-wing extremist scene. “Blood and Honour” supported the three terrorists in hiding to the end.

There were other informers in the environs of the later neo-NSU. From 1996 to 2003, as part of “Operation Rennsteig”, the secret service had recruited at least eight informants in the Thuringia neo-

Nazi scene.

The *Frankfurter Rundschau* recently reported that the federal and state secret service agencies had recruited at least another two informants in the Thuringia neo-Nazi scene, under the operational name “Saphira”. This increases the number of right-wing undercover informants controlled by the federal secret service in Thuringia to 10 between 1997-2005. The state secret service agencies in Thuringia and Saxony, and the Military Counterintelligence MAD, also had their own spies in the right-wing scene.

The Bundestag (federal parliament) committee of investigation received a note from the federal secret service from the second half of 1998 reporting a conversation with the Thuringia neo-Nazi “N” from Jena. N was regarded as the link between the NSU trio and the Jena scene. N was cooperative and offered to provide information about the neo-Nazis Mundlos, Zschäpe and Böhnhardt in hiding. Whether his offer was accepted remains unclear.

According to a report by a commission appointed by the Thuringia Interior Ministry, headed by former federal judge Gerhard Schäfer, the leader of “Blood and Honour” in Saxony, Jan W., was apparently in telephone contact with the Saxony Interior Ministry in 1998. About half a year after the three NSU terrorists went underground, Jan W. sent his contact in the Saxony Interior Ministry a text message reading, “Hello, what about the bangs [Bums]”. Schäfer regards this as referring to weapons that W. had probably requested for the Zwickau trio.

The claim that the intelligence agencies and police authorities were unaware of the extreme right-wing series of murders—which the media parrot and explain away with references to “incompetence”, “breakdowns”, “sloppy working” and “chaos”—is absurd. All the evidence and warnings were ignored by the intelligence services, deliberately suppressed and brushed aside.

This also applies to the case of the Hesse state secret service agent Andreas T., who was at the scene of the Kassel Internet cafe where Halit Yozgat was murdered in April 2006, the ninth victim of the NSU. According to the official version, the presence of the intelligence operative, whose right-wing views earned him the nickname “Little Adolf” in his hometown, was “a coincidence”. Meanwhile, it is also known that he was in telephone contact with his undercover informant from the “Blood and Honour” network at the time of two other NSU murders in 2005: a Turk in Munich and a Greek retailer in Nuremberg.

It is likely that further evidence will surface of close cooperation between the secret services and the neo-Nazis and the Zwickau trio. Last week Reinhard Boos, the president of the Saxony LfV, resigned. Following Heinz Fromm, president of the federal secret service, and Thomas Sippel, chief of Thuringia LfV, Boos is the third domestic intelligence chief to step down because of the NSU murders.

The grounds for Boos’ resignation are wiretap transcripts of the extreme right in 1998, which the Saxony secret service held back for months. According to *Spiegel Online*, these involved intercepted telephone calls by Saxony “Blood & Honour” leader Jan W., from which it is apparent that he was in touch with Mirko H., an undercover agent of the federal secret service. *Spiegel Online* also reported rumours that the resignation was related to files that have already been shredded by the Federal Office.

The resignation of Boos suggests that the contents of the files are relevant. Perhaps the records relate to André E., one of the three men in closest contact with the NSU murderers. Investigators found rail cards in the names of André E. and his wife Susann, which had been

used by Zschäpe and Böhnhardt in the burned-out mobile home in which Böhnhardt and Mundlos were found dead last November.

The *Frankfurter Rundschau* had reported in February that the secret service had tried three times to recruit André E. as an undercover agent. At that time, Boos vehemently denied that these attempts were successful.

It is clear that the authorities have something to hide in the case of André E. Upon his arrest on November 24, 2011, his cell phone was seized and sent to a special department of the federal police by the Federal Criminal Police (BKA). After the data on the mobile phone had been downloaded and sent to the BKA, the BKA instructed the federal police by email to delete the data from the mobile phone held on their computers.

André E. was the first person Zschäpe rang on November 4, 2011, after she had set her apartment in Zwickau on fire and fled the scene. An evaluation of André E.’s mobile phone could have provided clues about who he then called, including perhaps the secret service or police authorities.

What is certain is that Zschäpe had contact with the authorities. According to the Schäfer report, evaluation of the connection data of Zschäpe’s mobile phone on November 4 last year showed 15 attempted telephone calls originating from the Saxony Interior Ministry and the Southwest Saxony Police Department.

Just recently, Hartfrid Wolff, the FDP member in the Bundestag committee of inquiry, presented a secret file describing over several pages an attempt to recruit a young unemployed woman from Thuringia in the 1990s who owned a cat and had a close bond with her grandmother—a description that fits Beate Zschäpe.

On the same evening, after a review of the files, the committee chair Sebastian Edathy (SPD) said on behalf of all its members that the few women in the neo-Nazi scene at that time apparently included a second woman with the same characteristics as Zschäpe. Speculation about Zschäpe lacked “any foundation”, he said, but gave no reason for this assertion.

All of the political parties, with the media in their wake, are trying to play down the close relationship between the neo-Nazi scene and the secret services. It is increasingly evident that the secret services, or at least significant sections thereof, have participated actively in the development of right-wing organisations with the support or acquiescence of the very same political parties.



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