

Germany's Left Party closes ranks with German intelligence

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On March 13, the Left Party invited the president of Germany's domestic intelligence agency (Office for the Protection of the Constitution, VS) Hans-Georg Maassen, to a public debate titled "Office for the Protection of the Constitution—Reform or Dissolution."

The scandal surrounding the involvement of German intelligence and police in the activities of the neo-Nazi terrorist National Socialist Underground (NSU) organisation has thrown the VS into crisis. Investigations into the string of murders committed by the NSU have exposed how the VS encouraged, built up and financed far-right groups. Under these conditions, the Left Party is reaching out to help defend the VS.

Before Maassen's arrival, Left Party deputies Jan Korte, Petra Pau and Ulla Jelpke mentioned "proposals for dissolving the domestic intelligence agency." After Maassen's arrival, however, they made clear they ruled out any such disbanding of the secret service. They warmly welcomed Maassen, sat down with him on a couch, talked about the strengths and weaknesses of the intelligence agency, and finally met for a beer at the bar.

The Left Party was thereby sending a clear signal. The Left Party wants to participate in Maassen's plans for "reform," which aim to make the intelligence agency more powerful than ever.

The very fact that the Left Party met with the chief of the secret service makes clear the party's close relationship with the apparatus of state repression.

The Orwellian name, "constitutional protection," is a cover for a thoroughly undemocratic organization, whose task is to spy on anyone critical of the existing political order—a mission incompatible with constitutionally protected rights to freedom of expression.

2,600 full time employees of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, plus an equivalent number at a state level, as well as an unknown number of undercover agents and other spies are employed to investigate citizens' political views. In carrying out their work, they employ methods which police and other investigative agencies are not legally entitled to use.

There is no democratic control over the agency and, as Left Party deputy Petra Pau made clear, when select MPs are given information about the VS' activities, they are pledged to maintain strict confidentiality. Pau, who sits on the committee, explained how she was allowed access to secret files at the intelligence agency headquarters in Berlin-Treptow but was not allowed to speak with anyone about their contents.

Pau said that the main task of the current parliamentary committee to investigate the NSU was to "buy parliamentary and public opinion, and transform them into tight-lipped accomplices of the secret services." While she admitted this, Pau visibly has no problem in continuing to be a member of the parliamentary committee.

The VS does not limit its activities to "observing" political dissidents. Its denunciations and espionage have destroyed the livelihoods of thousands of left-wing people.

After the ban on the German Communist Party (KPD) in 1956, the VS and state attorney's offices initiated proceedings against an estimated 125,000 to 200,000 people. Between 7,000 and 10,000 communists were sentenced to prison or fined.

Many of those persecuted had been active in the resistance to the Nazi regime. On a number of occasions, they were sentenced and punished by agents and judges who had played an active role in the Nazi

dictatorship. Hubert Schrübbers headed the post war intelligence agency from 1955 to 1972. He was a former member of the Nazi SA and a chief prosecutor under the Nazis.

After the adoption in 1972 of the Decree against Radicals by the Social-Democratic government led by Willy Brandt, the intelligence agencies vetted 1.4 million mostly young candidates employed in public services. Over one thousand were prevented from following their profession due to VS denunciations.

Maassen publicly defended this tradition in Berlin. He argued that “this system had to be defended,” adding that he considered “anyone who wants to change it as an enemy of the constitution ... Whoever seeks a change of the system must be monitored.”

This also applies to parliamentarians, who enjoy immunity from prosecution.

The website of the VS says that 31,800 people are on their list of the “left-wing extremist spectrum.” which is to be monitored. Under conditions of rising social tensions and growing opposition to capitalism, such lists can quickly become the basis for political persecution.

Maassen stressed that the VS will continue to monitor “extremist groupings” inside the Left Party, including the so-called Communist Platform. Maassen also defended the use of undercover agents who are smuggled into groups and parties to obtain information. None of the Left Party deputies disagreed with Maassen, thereby confirming that they support the VS’ policies and practices, even when directed against their own party.

The Left Party, with its roots in the ruling East German Stalinist party, has a long tradition in this respect. In the former GDR, the Stasi secret police was notorious for its surveillance and repression of dissident workers, intellectuals and party members with a critical standpoint.

Maassen defended the VS as an “early warning system” for democracy directed against both “extreme left” and “extreme rightist” tendencies. He thereby equated left-wing opponents of capitalism with the extreme right-wingers cultivated by the VS.

More and more details have emerged in recent months which indicate that the VS not only tolerated the activities of the terrorist NSU group, which carried out at least ten murders, but also indirectly supported

and helped build the group.

The Left Party’s move to close ranks with the VS in the wake of the NSU scandal demonstrates their proximity to the apparatus of state repression. The joint public meeting with Maassen was a first for the Left Party, but the party has cultivated close relations with the VS and its chief through its participation in the parliamentary NSU-committee and other Bundestag committees.

In order to intensify such collaboration, the Interior Ministry decided last November to cease observation of the Left Party as a whole by the VS. In February the federal government confirmed this decision at the Administrative Court of Cologne. The Left Party referred to the decision as a “step to democratic normality” and has responded by seeking ever closer cooperation with the VS.

At the Berlin meeting, Jan Korte, who sits for the Left Party in the Home Affairs Committee of the Bundestag, suggested to Maassen that “public institutions, foundations and academics” could take over tasks of the VS. In other words, Korte proposes using academics and private organizations as part of a massive spy network.

Maassen described this proposal as “a good approach.” He regarded the NSU scandal as an opportunity to strengthen the intelligence agency and make it more powerful. Along with German Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich, Maassen had decided that “there could no longer be deficits regarding coordination.” The cooperation between domestic intelligence agencies and the provinces would be improved, he said, and the Federal Agency would now collect “all information centrally.”

The collaboration between the Left Party and the VS takes place at a time of huge social tensions in Germany and throughout Europe. By cementing its alliance with Maassen and the VS, the Left Party is signalling to the ruling class that it is ready to play its role in suppressing popular opposition to the capitalist system.



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