

Latest disclosures link German state with neo-Nazi terrorists

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In recent weeks, numerous details have come to light, indicating close connections between German government bodies and the neo-Nazi terrorist network, the National Socialist Underground (NSU). The revelations confirm that state authorities and security services were directly in touch with persons closely associated with the NSU terrorists. It has also become clear that these state bodies are continuing their attempt to hinder and sabotage a full understanding of the background to the series of murder.

Many of the new allegations relate to the period immediately before January 1998, when the three suspected terrorists—Beate Zschäpe, Uwe Böhnhardt and Uwe Mundlos—went into hiding. The three NSU members now stand accused of 10 acts of murder.

Prior to the disappearance of the three terrorists, several government agencies had numerous opportunities to arrest Uwe Böhnhardt. The failure to arrest him shows that the authorities were apparently not interested in taking the neo-Nazis into custody.

According to the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Böhnhardt was sentenced on October 16, 1997, to two years and three months incarceration for sedition and other offences. The verdict did not become final until December 10 of that year. Long-serving Berlin juvenile magistrate Helmut Frenzel complained to the *Frankfurter Rundschau* that this was followed by seven weeks, during which the then 20-year-old Böhnhardt was neither summoned to serve his sentence nor placed under arrest. On January 26, 1998, he finally dropped out of police surveillance while they were foraging through the trio's bomb workshop.

However, Judge Frenzel criticises not only the Thuringia state judiciary's negligent handling of the condemned Böhnhardt, who—he alleges—could have been arrested "before Christmas 1997". In Frenzel's view, the police had deliberately delayed the arrest. The emergence of the NSU could thus have been easily prevented.

But there are other points indicating that Uwe

Böhnhardt was deliberately placed undercover and allowed to run free. Such a suspicion arises primarily from the operations of the state of Thuringia's secret service department (LfV).

As the *Frankfurter Rundschau* reported in another article, the Thuringia criminal detection department (LKA) put Böhnhardt under observation in October 1997, after unknown persons had planted several dummy bombs in the town of Jena. But the LKA had to end their surveillance after three days, according to the testimony of several police officers to the Thuringia committee of inquiry.

Instead of the LKA, the secret service department was then tasked with the surveillance—something "uniquely exceptional", said the officers. They claim they are still unaware of the reasons for the move. They also state that, during their surveillance, they had the impression they were not the only ones monitoring Böhnhardt. One officer testified: "We realised that someone else was already on to Böhnhardt. But we still don't know who that was".

It is also remarkable that the LfV secret service agents needed only two days to find the bomb workshop—and then let six weeks pass before informing the LKA about it. According to an earlier statement by former Thuringia LfV President Helmut Roewer, his office had been notified "by a human source" that the right-wing milieu was busily engaged in plotting with explosives. So there was probably another informant, whose existence and identity are so far unknown to the public.

As observed by television current affairs programme *Die Story im Ersten*, the investigation of the bomb workshop on January 26, 1998, did not result in any arrest warrants for the trio. Böhnhardt's car, in which he was able to flee without hindrance, was also not searched. Moreover, it is striking that the police officers, who were dealing with the case until then, were not required to participate in the action undertaken on that day.

Mario Melzer, the leading detective involved in the case and determined to conduct a rigorous pursuit of the trio at the time, was subsequently transferred to another post. Since his testimony to the committees of inquiry in Erfurt and Berlin in 2012, he has been prohibited from receiving any further official information from the current leadership of the Thuringia LKA. Apparently, that authority still has important things to hide.

The TV programme suggested that the LfV wanted to protect its undercover agent, Tino Brandt, after the trio went into hiding. Whether this was the only reason for allowing the trio to remain free is currently unclear. It appears at least from the televised report that the federal criminal detection department (BKA) was aware of the official practice of covering up for secret service agents, even when involved in serious crimes.

The apparent sabotage of the investigation, which the responsible authorities in Thuringia are continuing to this day, is not a one-off affair. Elsewhere, state institutions are thwarting attempts to get to the bottom of the near decade-long series of murders and their connections to the state apparatus.

A few weeks ago, the state of Brandenburg's LfV was forced to admit to having improperly passed on crucial facts about the NSU trio's social environment to other state offices. In 1998, Brandenburg undercover agent "Piatto" is said to have reported that three neo-Nazis in hiding were planning to obtain guns, commit robberies, gain access to passports, and then take refuge abroad. According to a report by the N-TV television station, the authorities in Thuringia and Saxony heard nothing of this intelligence information.

As recently announced, the federal intelligence agency (BfV) evidently shielded a former undercover agent until 2012 to save him from prosecution. In the summer of 2001, "Primus"—alias Ralf M., from Zwickau—was suspected of hiring the two vehicles in which the members of the NSU drove to southern Germany to commit two of their murders.

The name of the rental firm that provided the cars remains unknown. "Primus" denies any complicity in the crimes. But former intelligence officer Michael Faber considers the denial implausible, due to the timing of the rental and the murders, and "Primus's" close connections with the right-wing milieu.

As the N-TV programme indicated in a further report, "Primus" was in close contact with the suspected arms suppliers, Jan Werner and André E. The latter is also in the dock at the NSU trial. The Zwickau undercover agent

is thought to have been financially supported to a lavish extent by the BfV. If Faber is to be believed, "Primus" was initially only a casual worker: "Then, after an extremely short time, he opened a business and ended up as a haulage contractor. He must have earned a lot of money from federal government", said Faber.

If "Primus" did indeed support the trio, then it is clear why the BfV waited until 2012 to reveal his employment as an undercover man: legal culpability for "supporting a terrorist organisation" lapses after a period of 10 years at the latest. The declaration that he had resigned from service in 2002 could have been used as an excuse for shredding his record "in accordance with the procedural deadline" in 2010.

It is also possible that state agencies in North Rhine-Westphalia are more deeply involved in the machinations of the right-wing terrorism than previously known. As a Cologne businessman said in a sworn statement, two civilian police officers appeared conspicuously early on the scene shortly after the bombing on Cologne's Keupstraße. The June 2004 nail-bomb attack, which is attributed to the NSU, injured 22 people, some seriously; many of them were migrants.

The North Rhine-Westphalia interior ministry has now admitted to the presence of the two police officers—more than eight years after the attack. Even the federal parliamentary investigation committee refuses to consider the occurrence coincidental. Clemens Binninger, chairman of the Christian Democratic Union, said that Keupstraße did not lie within the patrol domain of the two officers and their guard dogs. Furthermore, one of the city's two police superintendents was also there—a rank hardly to be encountered on a normal police patrol.

As soon as 5 to 10 minutes before the arrival of the first police and fire vehicles, the two junior officers were on the scene, where—in Binninger's words—they must have "almost stumbled over the feet" of the perpetrators.



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