

German SPD and Greens defend mass surveillance

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Following the visit to the US by the German interior minister, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens have accused the Berlin government of neglecting Germany's economic interests in relation to the NSA spying affair and of caving in to the United States. However, the mass surveillance of the population has the support of the opposition parties.

Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich (Christian Social Union, CSU) travelled to the US last week to speak with Vice President Joe Biden and Attorney General Eric Holder about the monitoring of telephone and Internet data in Germany. Among other things, whistle-blower Edward Snowden has revealed that at least 500 million items of data from Germany are captured and stored by the NSA every month.

At a press conference in Washington on Friday, Friedrich offered full support to the United States, and defended the monitoring of a large part of the population. His American partners had told him that the comprehensive monitoring had prevented five terrorist attacks in Germany, according to Friedrich. Because the "operational activities of the secret services" were involved, no further information on the scope and objectives of the monitoring should be expected any time soon, he said.

Representatives of the SPD and the Greens, who are currently engaged in campaigning for the general election and hope to take over the government on 22 September, criticised Friedrich and described the results of his trip as "ridiculous" and a "mockery." The lead candidate for the Greens, Jürgen Trittin, told *ZDF* television that Friedrich had "failed plain and simple."

In a comment in the *Tagesspiegel*, SPD chancellor candidate Peer Steinbrück accused Chancellor Angela Merkel of having broken her oath of office. She had failed to prevent damage to the German people, and in

particular, the "threats of economic and political espionage," said Steinbrück. "The haste with which Interior Minister Friedrich allowed himself to be fobbed off during his 'information-gathering trip' to Washington by the feeble explanations of the US administration has less to do with friendship than with obedience."

Trittin elaborated on the basis of this criticism to *Spiegel Online*: "Of course, you have to cooperate with the Americans in certain areas," he said. "But there are limits. And they end where there is total surveillance. Our economy cannot be spied upon. And our intellectual property must be protected." To do this, he called for a Special Commission of the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), and proposed that the "full range of cooperation with the Americans be examined."

The SPD-Green government that ruled in Germany from 1998 to 2005 had opposed the United States in relation to the war in Iraq, for example, said Trittin, even if Washington "did not like it." Other Green Party representatives called for the establishment of a parliamentary committee.

The chair of the SPD, Sigmar Gabriel, peppered his call for the defense of the interests of German business with a few phrases about civil rights. He saw the "fundamental values of our society" being destroyed by the joint monitoring by corporations and the state, Gabriel told *Spiegel Online*. Under these circumstances, "the protection of the individual" only exists on paper.

The hypocrisy of these statements is apparent. Both the SPD and the Greens are primarily responsible for the attacks on democratic rights and the growth of surveillance in Germany. Their current protestations express the fears of a section of the German business and finance elite, who see their interests threatened by

the American surveillance. They respond by expanding their own capacity to monitor and proceed even more aggressively against the general population.

SPD interior policy expert Michael Hartmann spoke out unequivocally in favour of stronger monitoring of Internet traffic by the BND secret service agency. “Germany has a huge pent-up demand in the field of Internet surveillance,” Hartmann told the *Berliner Zeitung*. Therefore, it was important to “spend the money necessary so that the BND is at the top of the game.”

The SPD has supported the decision of the conservative government not to grant Snowden asylum in Germany, and Trittin also opposes granting asylum to the whistle-blower. When *Der Spiegel* declared that the former SPD-Green interior minister, Otto Schily, would hardly have agreed to asylum for someone like Snowden, Trittin agreed and made clear that he also rejects asylum. “I’m in favour of a residence permit, because that corresponds to the political interests of Germany,” he said in the *Tagesspiegel* interview. Contrary to the status of asylum, such a permit could be revoked at any time.

When the SPD and Greens were in government they introduced so-called “security packages” implementing fundamental attacks on the democratic rights of the population. These legalized the interception of telecommunications and the location data from mobile phones, as well as the retention of all Internet data by the secret services. In the entire postwar history of Germany the SPD is the party that has enacted the most laws concerning surveillance.

Collaboration with the American intelligence agencies is much more intensive than Trittin would have us believe. In the UN Security Council, the SPD-Green government had indeed voted against the invasion of Iraq, but still worked together closely with American troops, especially on the intelligence level. The cooperation of the German intelligence services with the NSA regarding the mass surveillance of the population is likely to date back to the time of the SPD-Green government.

Former foreign minister and current leader of the SPD, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, was head of the chancellery at that time, and was thus responsible for the intelligence services. It is therefore impossible that he knew nothing of their actions. Interior Minister Otto

Schily (SPD), who played a leading role organizing the destruction of democratic rights, and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party) must also have been well informed.

This is why the SPD and the Greens are completely silent on this question. On Monday, the *Bild* newspaper reported that the BND was aware not only of the monitoring of all Internet traffic in Germany and around the world, but had for years sent requests to the NSA for access to the stored data. This was done, for example, in the case of a kidnapping of a German citizen abroad.

One and a half weeks ago, Gert-René Polli, who from 2002 to 2008 was president of the Austrian federal secret service, told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that he could not believe that the German intelligence agencies were unaware of the monitoring. He himself had known about the Prism monitoring program, albeit under another name. It was “absurd and unnatural” if the German authorities now claimed they knew nothing about it.



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