

Germany: Former SPD Interior Minister Otto Schily defends mass surveillance

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Former Social Democratic Party (SPD) Interior Minister Otto Schily intervened this week in the debate surrounding the Snowden affair. In an interview with news magazine *Der Spiegel*, he expressly defends the mass surveillance and storage of Internet data, and attacks those critical of this practice as being paranoid.

In the interview, Schily's extremely aggressive approach makes clear what can be expected from an SPD-Green Party coalition, should this emerge from September's general elections.

"Law and order are social democratic values", he said, concisely expressing the fact that in parliamentary Germany it has been the SPD that is responsible for the most serious attacks on the social and democratic rights of ordinary working people.

Schily's interview was in response to the revelations of the whistle-blower Edward Snowden, who has proved that the American National Security Agency (NSA) works closely together with Germany's Federal Intelligence Agency (BND), responsible for foreign intelligence, and the domestic secret services to spy on the entire German and international population. Emails, telephone calls and location data is being stored and evaluated electronically, and made available to the secret services.

In the interview, Schily compared this historically unprecedented global surveillance of the entire population to the obligation for businesses to preserve their accounting records in case the tax authorities need to check them.

"There are many databases which the state can access in pursuing criminal investigations," said the former interior minister, and so attempted to downplay the machinations of the secret services.

Schily argues that the state has the right to employ such dictatorial measures because it is a democratic

state. "Under the democratic rule of law, the state does not spy on any citizen, but is seeking to counter dangers," he said, in reference to the Snowden revelations. In order to protect the "fundamental right to security", the state may limit other human rights.

People must "show a degree of trust in the state and its security agencies", especially the BND and domestic secret services. "The fear of the state is becoming somewhat ridiculous," Schily said. "One shouldn't behave as if the greatest danger for people in Germany comes from the NSA." Germany's security laws have contributed considerably to the country being spared terrorist attacks, according to the ex-minister.

Such cynicism is hard to beat. In reality, there were at least 8 fatal terrorist attacks during Schily's time in office and they were all carried out by the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground (NSU). Not only did the secret services know about the murders, they systematically funded and provided cover for them. It remains to be seen if the NSU members were themselves on the secret service payroll.

The arrogance with which Schily passes over these facts, and defends the criminal activities of the secret services arises directly from the politics of the SPD. Up to now, SPD representatives had been rather reluctant to speak about the topic. The party's candidate for chancellor in the general elections, Peer Steinbrück, has criticised Chancellor Angela Merkel for not doing enough against industrial espionage, but has said virtually nothing about the mass surveillance.

Schily's reactionary comments reveal the true programme of the SPD. They show that the party is preparing to form a government of social confrontation, which will act brutally against the general population, further undermining fundamental democratic and social rights. The attacks on democratic rights undertaken by

the SPD-Green party coalition in which Schily was interior minister, between 1998 and 2005, were closely bound up with the social cuts and deregulation introduced by the government which drove millions of workers into poverty. They were not directed against terrorists, but against the opposition of workers who did not wish to accept the social devastation being wrought by the Hartz IV and Agenda 2010 welfare and labour “reforms”.

Among other things, Schily introduced laws for the surveillance of all telecommunications traffic and of bank account data by the secret services. He set up the G10 Commission, a parliamentary body supposed to provide oversight and control of these measures. The data gathered could be stored for 10 or 15 years, or even longer, at the discretion of the Commission chief. Moreover, it was agreed to collect and utilise flight and passenger data.

The previous NSA and CIA chief Michael Hayden told the broadcaster ZDF that the close collaboration between the German and American secret services in monitoring the general population began straight after the terrorist attacks of 2001. In the *Spiegel* interview, Schily confirmed that he had always maintained a “close and trusting relationship with the American secret services”.

Since then social conflicts in Europe have intensified enormously. The German government has played a leading role in the destruction of the social rights of Greek, Spanish and other European workers. In Germany, the low wage sector is growing due to SPD-Green policies and in almost all the major spheres of industry mass sackings are being prepared.

Under these conditions, support is growing in ruling circles for the return of an SPD-Green Party federal government. Such an administration would act harshly against the working class, and introduce further authoritarian measures in order to push through social attacks. As between 1998 and 2005, they would do this in close collaboration with the trade union bureaucracy.

In this regard, the ruling class has continuously depended on the SPD, ever since the party supported the First World War. When Schily describes the SPD as a law-and-order party, he is quite right.

In 1919, the SPD defended the bourgeois state and its order with violent force against the rebellious working class. The SPD minister of defence Gustav Noske saw

that the mass uprisings were bloodily suppressed by the military and the far-right *Freikorps*. Thousands of workers were killed.

Since then, the SPD has always sided with the state when it came to attacking democratic rights. The party voted for Heinrich Brüning’s dictatorial emergency measures during the Weimar Republic, and supported the election of former general Paul von Hindenburg as president, who went on to appoint Hitler as Chancellor. The SPD refused to fight against the coming to power of the Nazis.

After the Second World War, the SPD supported the 1956 ban of the German Communist Party (KPD), voted for the anti-democratic emergency laws of 1968, and in 1972 introduced the *Berufsverbot*, a law preventing members of left-wing organisations and student groups from exercising certain professions.

The ruthlessness and brutality of the party has grown in proportion to the support it has lost among the working class as a result of its right-wing politics. Today, it is a bureaucratic apparatus full of careerists that will do everything to push through the attacks on the social and democratic rights of workers. This was made clear by the last SPD-Green Party government, and is once again confirmed by Schily in his interview.

The SPD is not only supported unconditionally by the Greens, but also by the Left Party. On the day Schily’s interview was published, the parliamentary leader of the Left Party, Gregor Gysi gave an interview to broadcaster ZDF in which he expressed the readiness of his own party to support a coalition with the SPD after the elections. The deployment of German troops abroad is no longer a line which the Left Party will not cross, according to Gysi.



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