German Left Party reacts to NSA spying scandal with call for stronger secret services

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In its manifesto for the recent parliamentary elections, the Left Party paid lip service to the demand for the dissolution of the German secret services. Its tone has changed significantly following revelations that the German government was under surveillance from America's National Security Agency (NSA).

Now, the party is calling for German counterintelligence services to be beefed up and the powers of the state increased, supposedly in order to defend Germany's economic interests against the US.

The leader of the Left Party parliamentary group, Gregor Gysi, complained that the German secret services are not working effectively enough. For him, Edward Snowden's revelations show the "failure of Germany's secret services, because their job is also counter-espionage—for society and business alike," Gysi declared. "They probably operate against the East, but not against the West."

In the business daily *Handelsblatt*, party chair Bernd Riexinger calls for economic sanctions against the United States. There has to be a quick "initial warning shot". The government should "impose a penalty tax on the US Internet giants that make billions of dollars here, and then disappear with the money and the data from Europe".

Left Party parliamentary vice chair Sahra Wagenknecht demanded the EU's proposed free trade agreement with the United States be "buried".

Alongside industrial espionage, Left Party chair Katja Kipping, also raised the potential for blackmailing the German Chancellor, as Merkel's communication protocols are "in a hide-hole in Washington". Together with Gysi and Riexinger, she published a statement saying that the US was "replacing the principle of multilateral partnership with unilateral self-righteousness" and that for this reason, transatlantic relations had to be redefined.

To this end, she stressed, all parliamentary parties—including the Left Party, that is—should work together "with the greatest possible unity".

To improve Germany's position vis-à-vis the United States, Steffen Bockshahn, the Left Party's representative in the Parliamentary Oversight Body (PKGr), called for the German secret services to be strengthened. So far, he said, these had failed "to protect us from espionage".

Unlike certain other Left Party members, Bockshahn spoke openly against a public inquiry into the NSA affair by the Bundestag (parliament). "I think a committee of inquiry is not helpful," he wrote in a statement.

Instead, he makes clear that the counterintelligence services he wants come at a price. "Intelligence agencies are immoral. They spy, they sniff about, they violate privacy," he writes. "Unless you completely reject the secret services then you must live with the fact that they do what they are there for. They do whatever's possible."

This line of reasoning coincides with the US intelligence officials' arguments before a committee of the House of Representatives on Tuesday—justifying NSA spying by saying that such activities had been going on for decades and were standard operating procedure for the intelligence services.

With its call to strengthen Germany's counterintelligence capacity, the Left Party has joined in the chorus of official German and international politics.

Josef Joffe, the arch-conservative editor of the political weekly *Die Zeit*, demanded last week in the *Financial Times* that the German government emulate "the fabled Second World War *Abwehr* [counterintelligence]" service. He added, "Good counterintelligence is more effective than sulky pouting; the best defence is offence."

The similarity of the arguments of Joffe and the Left Party has profound political roots. The close collaboration with the secret services and the state apparatus is one of the hallmarks of the Left Party.

As the successor to the Stalinist state party in the former East Germany, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)

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was, from the beginning, a party of law and order. It organized the restoration of capitalism in East Germany and suppressed opposition by the workers to the massive social cuts that followed. In 2007, it merged with the equally anti-working class ex-West German union bureaucrats in the WASG (Election Alternative for Social Justice) to form the Left Party.

The more the crimes of Germany's overseas Federal Intelligence Service (BND) and the domestic Secret Service (VS) are uncovered, the more the Left Party moves to support them. Following the first Snowden revelations in July, Bockshahn defended the duty of confidentiality of the members of the PKGr. This should be accepted when it concerns "really hot information," Bockshahn said.

His party colleague Ulrich Maurer sits for the Left Party in the G10 Parliamentary Commission, which reviews and approves the monitoring activities of the intelligence services. Even after the NSA revelations, Maurer said that the intelligence agencies were upholding the law, and in examining surveillance applications he did not "operate on a basis of mistrust".

The Vice President of the Bundestag, Petra Pau, was the Left Party representative on the Committee of Inquiry into the right-wing terrorist group National Socialist Underground (NSU). She praised the "exemplary" cooperation of all political groups and participated in covering up the role of the Secret Service in the murders carried out by the NSU.

The Left Party has now responded to the spying on the Chancellor's Office by also distancing itself from criticism of the secret services, and demanding they be deployed against the United States. Such steps, the party argues, would assist in protecting the population.

In reality, this policy means a stepping up of state powers directed against the working class. The Snowden documents prove that the German secret services are the main agency organising surveillance of the German population. While the domestic Secret Service (VS) and the overseas Federal Intelligence Service (BND) provided data to the NSA, this was obtained using the X-Keyscore software supplied by the NSA, which enables the mass surveillance of domestic communications.

The members of the domestic and foreign intelligence agencies recruited in Germany after the Second World War, were, to a large extent, made up of former members of Hitler's SA, SS and SD. The history of these organisations is riddled with intrigues, crimes and provocations against forces identified as oppositional. These are the criminal organizations the Left Party now wants to deploy at home and abroad.

This policy serves to prepare ferocious social attacks and a more aggressive foreign policy. Both are incompatible with democratic rights. Faced with a grand coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Left Party, as the largest opposition party, would play a key role in enforcing this agenda against the workers and to forge an all-party alliance.

In an interview with the broadcaster n-tv , Gysi said that the Left Party's new role also means new responsibilities: "We now bear a different responsibility for the society of the Federal Republic of Germany."

Wagenknecht said on Monday in an interview with the daily *Die Welt* that the Left Party was ready at any time to help form a government, should the incoming grand coalition collapse.

To defend their social and democratic rights and take up the fight against the NSA, BND and VS, workers need to unite with their counterparts in the US and around the world on the basis of a socialist programme.

To do this, they must decisively reject the pseudo-left organizations such as the Left Party, which rest on wealthy sections of the upper middle class and, as social conflicts intensify, line up openly with the state apparatus. With its support of the intelligence services, the Left Party wants to suppress such an international movement of the working class.

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