

Following CIA spy revelations, German politicians turn on the US

Peter Schwarz
8 July 2014

The unmasking of a spy who passed on internal documents of the German foreign intelligence service (BND) to the CIA for money has led to unusually sharp attacks by German politicians on the United States.

Last Wednesday, a 31-year-old BND employee was arrested and later that evening made a comprehensive confession to the Federal Prosecutor in Karlsruhe. On Friday, the first details of the affair were leaked to the press.

According to what has been published, the detainee is a man with mobility and speech impediments who worked in the registry of the BND “Intervention Areas/Foreign Relations” department in Pullach, near Munich. Allegedly he contacted the US Embassy in Berlin via email at the end of 2012 to offer his services. Since then he has passed on more than 200 documents classified “confidential” to “top secret” to the CIA in return for €25,000.

Initially, it was reported that the spy had concentrated on obtaining information on the German parliamentary committee currently investigating the activities of US intelligence agencies in Germany. Later, these reports were corrected. According to the latest reports, just two of the documents passed on were destined for the parliamentary committee.

The spy was allegedly discovered by Germany’s domestic intelligence service, the *Verfassungsschutz*, when on May 28 he contacted the Russian Consulate in Munich by email to offer his services to Russia. On June 10, the responsible attorney general was informed. The spy was then put under observation for several weeks to track down his associates. Last Thursday, the day after his arrest, German Chancellor Angela Merkel was informed.

The political reaction in Berlin has been fierce. Last Friday, just before the official reception for the 4th of July, the American national holiday, US Ambassador John Emerson was summoned to the German Foreign Ministry.

On Saturday, Stefan Cornelius, who heads the foreign coverage department of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, warned: “If it is confirmed that an American intelligence service led a BND employee as a double agent, then Germany and the US are sliding into a political crisis of hitherto unknown dimensions.”

“This is how alliances are destroyed,” complained Cornelius, who is well-known for his pro-American sympathies. In order

to limit the damage, he called upon Washington to “now make plain publicly in whose name, and why, the German partner service was infiltrated.” There had to be “personal consequences,” he insisted.

Other commentaries appealed to the federal government to “finally put an end to its fawning diplomacy toward Washington.”

The *Bild* newspaper reported on an Interior Ministry document discussing the “planning of countermeasures.” In future, German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière would seek to monitor the communications of the United States and other allied countries, such as Britain and France, by German intelligence agencies.

Previously, the German chancellery had instructed German intelligence agencies not to spy on the country’s NATO allies.

On Sunday, German President Joachim Gauck, who had remained silent on the extensive spy activities of the NSA until now, spoke out about the affair. If the espionage accusation proves to be true, “then this is really playing with a friendship, with a close alliance,” he told ZDF television. “Enough is enough.”

Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier commented on the affair while on a diplomatic visit to Mongolia. If the allegations were true, “then we’re not talking about small things,” he said. He urged the US government to carry out “the fastest possible clarification” of the matter, warning: “In their own interest, the United States should obey their duty to participate.”

On Monday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel made a similar statement. Significantly, she did this during a joint appearance with Li Keqiang, the prime minister of China, whom the United States has targeted as its main international rival. Speaking in Beijing, she accused US intelligence services of a breach of trust. She spoke of “a very serious event,” which clearly contradicted her understanding of cooperation based on trust.

In reality, the unmasked agent is rather a small fish. He had no leadership function in the BND and his remuneration is regarded as modest in intelligence circles. Besides, the BND and the US secret services work so closely together that one wonders what secrets were left to reveal.

Just a week ago, BND President Gerhard Schindler defended

his agency's cooperation with the NSA as indispensable. His remark came on the heels of revelations that between 2004 and 2007, the BND had delivered huge amounts of raw data collected at an Internet node based in Frankfurt to the NSA.

Two former NSA employees, Thomas Drake and William Binney, who testified last Thursday to the NSA Committee of the German Parliament (Bundestag), said ties between the two agencies were so strong that the BND could be called "an appendage of the NSA." Drake even accused the BND of supplying data to the US for use in lethal drone attacks.

In comparison to the monitoring activities revealed by Edward Snowden, the latest spy case is rather small scale. The NSA and other US intelligence agencies spy on millions of people in Germany illegally, have tapped the Chancellor's cell phone, and continue to monitor government communications. Nevertheless, the federal government has consistently tried to downplay these issues.

Up to this day, Attorney General Harald Range has refused to launch a criminal investigation into the NSA's mass surveillance activities, even though he is obliged to do so by law. President Gauck, who began his political career as head of the Stasi Archives, has kept quiet on the monitoring activities of the NSA, although their scope far exceeds anything carried out by the former East German secret service.

The fierce reaction to the unmasking of a relatively low ranking agent has deeper reasons. It indicates a change in direction of German foreign policy.

Since the current government came to office late last year, Steinmeier, Gauck and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen, have intensively promoted a more active role for Germany in world politics and a revival of German militarism.

There is a consensus that a return to a more active imperialist German foreign policy can only take place together with, and not against the United States. However, the objective logic of this policy inevitably leads to conflicts over economic and geopolitical interests.

The debacle of US policy in Iraq has led to ever louder calls for German leadership. In addition, German government and economic circles are perturbed by America's confrontational course towards China. China is one of the most important markets for German industrial products and investments, and 2,500 German companies have invested around €40 billion in the country.

German business circles have also rejected US calls for economic sanctions against Russia. This question has split the EU, and Germany cannot hold the union together if it continues to unconditionally follow the American line. While Poland and other Eastern European states are calling for a tougher line against Moscow, Italy, which has just taken over the EU Presidency, France and other countries oppose such a confrontation.

At the end of June, the Austrian government even warmly welcomed Russian President Vladimir Putin in Vienna to sign a

contract on the South Stream pipeline, which the US is determined to sabotage.

There is a vigorous debate in German ruling circles about the country's relationship with the United States. Under the headline "The question of Alliance," the latest edition of *Der Spiegel* discusses whether a greater distance to the US and a closer relationship to Russia is desirable.

The news magazine had specifically commissioned a survey indicating that many Germans favor greater independence from the United States and increased cooperation with Russia. "A lot has happened in recent years: the war in Iraq, Guantanamo, the executions with drones, the financial crisis, the NSA, the fear of Google," *Der Spiegel* writes.

The article advocates a more active geopolitical role for Germany and claims: "The demand for more German responsibility is unanimous abroad." And if it is subsequently "sharply attacked—like any leading power ... that is part of the price to be paid."

The article concludes that "to break the alliance to the West [is] not an option," but nevertheless "Germany could make itself more independent of the US."

Germany has "grown up in the last twenty years. It can no longer hide behind others. Instead, Germany can lead Europe to an independent political role." For America, such a Germany "might not be an easy partner, but in the end it is more of a relief than a threat."

The fact that this is not true is already demonstrated by the intense spying on Germany by the United States, which the German Interior Minister now seeks to counter by having the German secret services spy on the United States. The increasing tensions between Germany and the United States, which fought each other in two world wars, is a result of the growing crisis of global capitalism, which has exacerbated class tensions and international conflicts.

The only social force that can prevent this is the international working class. It must not subordinate itself to the anti-Americanism of the German and European bourgeoisie, nor to the imperialist aims of the American bourgeoisie. It must unite internationally, to oppose growing militarism and combine the struggle against war with the struggle for socialism.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact