

Witness implicates German intelligence agency at neo-Nazi murder trial

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During last week's court investigations into murders committed by the National Socialist Underground (NSU), the testimony of a former leading undercover agent caused a sensation, which nevertheless went largely unreported.

On Tuesday, former employee of the Thuringian state secret service division (TLFV) Norbert Wießner appeared as a witness before the Munich higher regional court. His hearing confirmed that neo-Nazi circles in Thuringia were promoted and shielded by the federal state's intelligence service, the Office for Protection of the Constitution.

Between 1994 and 2001, Wießner worked for two stretches of time as the handler of Tino Brandt, the Thuringian state's most important spy in the neo-Nazi scene. According to his own testimony, the intelligence agency supplied Brandt with about 200,000 D-mark over seven years, which he largely used to fund the far-right milieu in Thuringia.

After Uwe Mundlos, Uwe Böhnhardt and Beate Zschäpe went into hiding in January 1998, because the police wanted to arrest them for the possession of explosives and construction of pipe bombs, Brandt remained in direct contact with Böhnhardt. Communications between the two included a telephone conversation on March 8, 1999. Brandt received calls from Böhnhardt in a public phone booth. His handler, Wießner, knew this. But although calls were made on five occasions, the intelligence agency did not intervene.

Wießner justified this to the Munich court by claiming, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, that he "was only responsible for gathering facts, not interpreting their significance". He thereby admitted to more than he probably intended. The intelligence authority had planted its undercover agents in the neo-

Nazi milieu, funded them generously, and allowed far-right operatives wanted by police on suspicion of terrorist activity to continue their operations undisturbed.

This is the clearest possible indication that the intelligence agency was not combating but supporting and promoting neo-Nazism. Wießner himself admitted in court that the agency "wanted to make Brandt even more trusted in the extreme right-wing scene, in order to get more information about the three [NSU murderers]."

Money went out directly to the NSU. Wießner said Brandt was given 500 D-marks for use as a gift to curry favour with Ralf Wohlleben. Wohlleben is on trial in Munich together with Beate Zschäpe, the only survivor of the NSU trio. At his hearing in July, Brandt himself had also admitted to having received six or seven times from the Thuringian intelligence service money intended to go directly to the NSU.

Wießner's testimony now makes it clear that the intelligence agency had no intention of discovering the identity of the trio or making them go into hiding. In the spring of 1999, according to *Spiegel Online*, Brandt told him that the three had changed their appearance so "that even their friends would not recognise them". But *Spiegel* also reported that Wießner had not enquired about how the group members now looked.

That such crucial questions were not asked was, according to Brandt, the result of an agreement he had made with the Thuringian secret service. *Spiegel Online* noted that, testifying at the NSU trial in July this year, Brandt had said the intelligence agency expressly relieved him of the necessity of reporting to his handler about any crimes, planned or already committed by members of the neo-Nazi milieu. He said the state department had "not been interested" in such

information.

Rarely has it so often been said out aloud that the intelligence agency was unconcerned about pursuing and apprehending criminal far-right operatives. The final report of the NSU committee of inquiry in the Thuringian state parliament noted that, in at least one case, the agency directly interfered with investigations into the neo-Nazi milieu, in order to protect its members from eventual prosecution by the state attorney or police.

Nevertheless, Brandt received regular payments at the weekly meetings for undercover agents. In exchange, he informed the intelligence service about planned marches and commemoration rallies. The agency was thus able to justify its deployment of undercover agents to the public and police.

At the same time, undercover agents like Tino Brandt aided and abetted extreme right-wing elements in Thuringia with the protection and financial support of the intelligence service. Brandt alone could expect a monthly payout of 1,200 to 1,300 D-marks, excluding special bonuses for certain neo-Nazi festive gatherings.

Secret service agent Wießner "played dumb" before the Munich court. Although the police had already uncovered one of the terrorist trio's bomb workshops in January 1998, he claimed that violence had not been an issue at the time. "For me, it was inconceivable that petty criminals could commit such acts," he said.

If one were to believe the statements of former intelligence operative Kai Dalek, who testified in the NSU proceedings on Wednesday, then Tino Brandt robustly encouraged radical violence in the neo-Nazi milieu. Dalek, who alleges he knew of Brandt's undercover activity during his own term of service, claimed Brandt had worked hard to promote "extreme acts of violence", according to the *Berliner Zeitung*. He said: "Brandt radicalised the scene and made sure it was militant."

Brandt himself had denied this story during his interrogation and, in turn, accused Dalek of having been particularly radical. From 1987 to 1998, Dalek was a secret agent for the Bavarian intelligence service.

In addition to the telephone conversation with Böhnhardt, Tino Brandt also supplied his agency controller with other information that could have lead to the arrest of the terror trio before even the first murder. As it emerged in Wießner's questioning, Brandt

had informed him in good time that Carsten Schultze had become the new contact person for the trio. Schultze is also a defendant in the NSU trial and has admitted to passing a gun on to Böhnhardt and Mundlos.

In its final report in September, the Thuringian committee of inquiry into the NSU murders concluded that the "accumulation of wrong and avoided decisions" raises "the suspicion that the apprehension of the fugitives was deliberately sabotaged and expressly thwarted". Now, however, the court appearance of Norbert Wießner has transformed this suspicion into fact.



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