

Octoberfest bombing: German government blocks information on intelligence agency involvement

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Almost 35 years after the worst right-wing extremist attack in post-war Germany, the government is blocking attempts to uncover what happened by withholding important documents. The government's stance can lead to only one conclusion: a state within the state exists in Germany that resists any sort of democratic control.

In the bomb attack at the Octoberfest in Munich on October 26, 1980, 12 bystanders were killed along with the bomber, Gundolf Köhler. Two hundred were seriously injured. Even at the time, authorities sought to cover up the background to the attacks and the individuals behind it. They quickly concluded that Köhler had carried out the attack alone. Evidence and witness statements suggested that state authorities and neo-Nazi terrorist groups were equally involved. Just two years after the attack, on November 23, 1982, the federal state prosecutor brought a halt to the investigation.

It was thanks to journalist Ulrich Chaussy and the lawyer for the victims, Werner Dietrich, that state prosecutor Harald Range was compelled to reopen the investigation last December. Thousands of files are to be re-evaluated, including never before seen material. However, all the files that could prove the involvement of German intelligence agents in the right-wing terrorist groups and the attack are to remain secret.

This is according to a written response by the justice ministry to Green Party parliamentary deputies, cited by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Parliamentary justice secretary Christian Lange (Social Democrats, SPD) wrote on April 7 that the government had once again come to the conclusion that “questions on the specifics of the source of guidance and the status of people as intelligence agents, even when it concerns events from a long time ago, cannot be answered due to the need to protect the functionality of the intelligence service.”

The justice ministry, led by the SPD's Heiko Maas, is thereby placing the “functionality of the intelligence

services” on a level of greater importance than the uncovering of a mass murder.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Lange's letter noted that the recruitment and maintenance of intelligence agents are elementary methods of intelligence work. “A special secrecy must therefore be maintained when a person was not an active agent or if the event occurred a long time ago.” Parliament's right to information has its limits “if the disclosure of secret information endangers the wellbeing of the federal republic or a state”, he said.

This claim could be used to justify any form of dictatorship. If the wellbeing of the state is more important than the right to information of parliament, which is supposed to control the executive branch, then democracy is a hollow shell. The justice ministry views the interests of the state and its intelligence services as more important than the rights of parliament and the public interest. The intelligence apparatus acts as a state within a state, rejecting any control on its power.

The opposition parties in parliament, the Greens and Left Party, had requested on several occasions that the German government make the secret files public, without success. Most recently, the government rejected a request from the Green Party fraction for the information in November. The Greens sent a letter of protest. Now, four months later with Lange's letter, the government has responded. The Green Party fraction now intends to lodge an appeal to the constitutional court in Karlsruhe to gain access to information about the involvement of intelligence agents in the Octoberfest attack.

According to available information, the main state involvement in the Octoberfest attack was through the Hoffmann military sports group and the ranger Heinz Lembke.

The Hoffmann military sports group was founded in 1973 by Carl-Heinz Hoffmann and was able to train neo-Nazis in using arms and fighting as partisans, unhindered, for six

years in Bavaria. Köhler, the attacker, participated in the activities of the paramilitary group in 1975 and 1976, according to the government. This was known to the state intelligence agency in Baden-Württemberg.

When on January 30, 1980, eight months prior to the Octoberfest attack, the military sports group was banned by interior minister Gerhard Baum (Free Democrats, FDP), it had 400 members. Hoffmann and his closest collaborators fled to Lebanon. Chaussy is convinced that several intelligence agents were in the group. Two of them are known by name: Walter Ulrich Behle and Odfried Hepp.

Behle said shortly after the attack, "It was us." One bomb had been placed in a rubbish bin, another in a drain pipe. This statement, confirming that two bombs had been planted but only the one in the bin detonated, corresponded with other witness statements.

The government continues to keep quiet on how many agents were actually active in the military group. The details on this were "so sensitive, that even a small risk of such information being made public cannot be accepted under any circumstances," stated a government letter from February to the Left Party.

Lembke is suspected of having supplied Köhler and his co-conspirators with the explosives for the bomb. In 1959, Lembke fled the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and immediately joined right-wing extremist groups such as the Fatherland Youth League (BVJ), becoming its leader in 1960. The BVJ was banned in 1962.

Lembke maintained contact with a wide variety of right-wing organisations. He monitored at least 33 weapons depots, including anti-tank weapons, hand grenades, explosives, machine guns, pistols, munitions and even chemical weapons, all of which were mostly obtained from German army stock. He also organised military sport exercises and supplied weapons to Nazi terrorist groups.

There is evidence that Lembke was in contact with the Hoffmann group, and was arrested in 1981 for a matter unrelated to the Octoberfest attack. Two days after he told the state prosecutor that he would provide comprehensive testimony, he was found hung in his cell.

The weapons and chemicals found in his weapons depots were immediately destroyed by the German army. A comparison with the explosives used in the Octoberfest attack was never made. Lembke was also portrayed as a lone wolf, and the investigation was quickly shut down.

All that is known about the Munich Octoberfest attack and the response of the authorities to it fits into the pattern of the secret Gladio force, built up by NATO during the Cold War in Europe to carry out terrorist attacks in the event of a Soviet invasion.

It was never officially explained to what extent Lembke or

the Hoffmann group worked for the NATO Gladio force. The quantity and quality of the recovered military weaponry pointed to Lembke's membership in the secret force, according to Swiss historian Daniele Ganser, who has researched the Gladio force.

In the documents relating to the Octoberfest attack, victims' lawyer Dietrich uncovered the remark that "information on Lembke can only partially be evaluated by the courts." According to the lawyer, such comments are usually used only in connection with intelligence agents and contractors with the intelligence services.

In the response to the Greens' request of November 21, 2014, the government contested such a conclusion. "Such an indication of the need to protect information for the intelligence services or police does not suggest that the person named in the evidence is an intelligence agent or secret source for the police." But in response to the question of whether Lembke worked for intelligence, the government refused to answer on the grounds of endangering state security.

The fact that close ties exist between the intelligence agencies and right-wing extremist terrorists was recently made clear in connection with the racist murders and attacks by the far-right National Socialist Underground (NSU) terrorist group. According to Chaussy, links existed between the Hoffmann group and the intelligence service in Thuringia, from which the NSU emerged.

The government is seeking to bury the true background to the Octoberfest attack in order to cover up the involvement of the state security forces with right-wing terrorist groups. When state prosecutor Range announced he was reopening the investigation into the Octoberfest attack, Justice Minister Maas did not justify it with reference to the need to uncover the full story, but rather that in the wake of the "oversights" surrounding the NSU affair, it was necessary to restore confidence in the activities of the intelligence agencies.



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