

SGP condemns German government's ban of linksunten.indymedia.org

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei
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The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) strongly condemns the banning by the German government of the left-wing website linksunten.indymedia.org and demands the immediate lifting of the ban. This brazen act of political censorship is a fundamental attack on freedom of speech and sets a precedent for the suppression of all social and political opposition.

In his justification of the ban, Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere left no doubt about the fact that he is seeking to suppress criticism of government policy and the established parties. “For years, they have been using this platform to sow hatred against different opinions and the country’s representatives,” he said. There could be “no places of refuge for extremists from the left or right—neither on the internet nor beyond it.”

In referring to “hatred against the country’s representatives” de Maiziere means the mounting anger towards a political elite which has nothing to offer the vast majority of the population besides austerity, attacks on democratic rights, and militarism.

De Maizière justified the ban by asserting that linksunten.indymedia.org is “the most influential internet platform for left-wing extremists prepared to commit acts of violence in Germany.” But this is a brazen lie.

In fact, the ban is not directed against posts containing illegal content. The authorities could have taken action against any post violating existing laws without banning the website by calling on administrators to remove them. Instead, the Interior Minister, without a court ruling, banned an internet platform whose main focus was the struggle against right-wing extremism, anti-refugee agitation and war.

[Linksunten.indymedia.org](http://linksunten.indymedia.org) was part of the global indymedia network founded in 1999 in connection with demonstrations against the World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle. The open platform published posts calling for protests against the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and right-wing extremist demonstrations, criticizing the federal government’s restrictive refugee policies, and exposing the right-wing extremist terrorist group National Socialist Underground. Other subjects included the struggle against war and militarism.

The banning of linksunten.indymedia.org is a major breach of press freedom, which is guaranteed under Article 5 of

Germany’s Basic Law. To legitimise this violation, de Maiziere employed a transparent legal sleight of hand. He declared the website to be an association so as to be able to ban it outright under the Associations Law.

The Associations Law is a relic from the German empire which was renewed in 1964. It makes a mockery of the rule of law and the separation of powers. It grants interior ministers at the federal and state level the power to ban an association and confiscate its wealth without a court hearing being held or those affected being allowed to testify. The precondition for a ban is that the activity of the association “runs counter to the criminal law” or are directed “against the constitutional order and the ideas of international understanding,” a vague paragraph that throws the door wide open to manipulation.

To date, only small violent groups like neo-Nazi organizations have been banned under the Association Law. This is the first time that the law has been used against an internet publication, or, for that matter any left-wing organization. The basis has thereby been established to censor or ban any website or platform criticizing the status quo. As the Interior Ministry confirmed in a response to an inquiry submitted via Twitter, the government considers any website with an “administrative team of at least two people” to be an “association in the sense of the broad concept of an association in the Association Law,” which can “be banned if the relevant preconditions are met.”

The banning of linksunten.indymedia.org is the high point to date of systematic efforts to censor and suppress left-wing and progressive internet publications. The ruling class is alarmed that the government-owned and corporate-controlled media is losing its monopoly on ideas, and that growing numbers of people are forming their own opinions. Under the threadbare pretext of combatting “fake news” or “hate speech,” they are seeking to bar the growth of political opposition.

In April, search giant Google introduced new algorithms that radically demoted content from socialist, progressive and anti-war websites in search results. These censorship measures were discussed with German government officials. Ben Gomes, Google’s Vice President of Engineering, visited Germany shortly before the announcement and took part in a meeting of the Broadcasting Commission. The site worst affected by these

measures was the *World Socialist Web Site*, which saw search traffic from Google drop dramatically.

At the end of June, the German parliament (Bundestag) adopted the so-called Network Enforcement Law which obliged providers like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Google to fulfill the role of a censorship authority. Without any judicial ruling, the companies must delete “obviously unlawful content” within 24 hours. Otherwise, they face the threat of fines of up to €50 million. What precisely is “obviously unlawful” will be determined by the major corporations and government authorities, outside of the courts.

Taking into account all of these developments, one gets the impression that authoritarian structures, the likes of which have not been seen since the Nazi dictatorship, are being erected. The German government’s attempts to censor the internet are increasingly comparable to those by authoritarian regimes in China or Turkey, which the German media regularly criticize.

Reporters Without Borders, one of the few organizations to denounce censorship by the German government, went on to state, “This is a troubling signal internationally and supplies a pretext to repressive regimes around the world to act like the German authorities.” Press freedom applies “also to uncomfortable publications, and even those which are hard to bear,” noted the organization’s operations director, Christian Mihr.

The second subsidiary of Indymedia in Germany, de.indymedia.org, which was not affected by the ban, described the move as a “serious attack on the left-wing movement and press freedom.”

By contrast, the mainstream media was overwhelmingly supportive of the ban. Engagement to defend press freedom is sorely lacking in German editorial offices, especially when it concerns their own country.

The Berlin-based *Tagesspiegel* titled an editorial, “The Indymedia ban is right, but doesn’t go far enough,” and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* went so far as to celebrate the ban as a victory for freedom of speech! “Precisely those who take to the streets against the rule of the powerful should welcome the ban,” wrote the mouthpiece of the Frankfurt stock exchange. “It secures freedom of speech and assembly for the peaceful and vulnerable.”

Political parties also endorsed the ban. Isolated criticism came only from the ranks of the Greens and Left Party. Justice Minister Heiko Maas (Social Democrats, SPD) wrote on Twitter, “Extremism, regardless of which side it comes from, can have no place with us—not even online.” Berlin’s Interior Senator, Andreas Geisel (SPD), explicitly welcomed the ban and spoke of a step in the right direction.

The censorship and suppression of press freedom is inseparable from the return of German militarism. Behind the backs of the population, influential circles in politics and the military are preparing a massive military build-up after the election.

Handelsblatt wrote last weekend that Germany stands “in the midst of a storm” of “several geopolitical crises,” because there is “no other land so dependent upon cross-border trade.” The US is no longer “a guarantor for the liberal world order following the election of the economic nationalist Trump.” Germany now has to fill “the leadership vacuum” and assume the role of global policeman, it wrote. Among the “political crises” Germany will have to deal with in the coming four years, the newspaper included conflicts in Korea, Venezuela, the South China Sea, Turkey, Syria, North Africa and the Arab peninsula, as well as “within the EU with Brexit.”

The German ruling elite knows full well that it can only enforce its militaristic plans through the suppression of opposition on the “home front.” Following the horrific crimes of German imperialism in the last century, the majority of the population opposes a return to militarism and war. Germany, among the most unequal countries in the world, is deeply polarized along class lines. As *Handelsblatt* put it, the “vast sums” that will be required “for the public security and defence of our country” in the future, “have to come from somewhere”—namely from wages and social spending.

During the First World War, the ruling class imprisoned opponents of the war like Rosa Luxemburg, who resisted the “Burgfriedenspolitik” agreed to by the SPD and trade unions. In the Weimar Republic, journalists like Carl von Ossietzky, who denounced rearmament, ended up in jail. And the Nazis prepared the way to World War II by violently crushing the workers’ movement and all political opposition.

Germany’s ruling elite is once again resorting to its authoritarian traditions, which is only temporarily set aside during the postwar period. Everything now depends upon the working class and young people intervening independently into political affairs. This is the goal of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei. The SGP is the only party standing in the federal election on a socialist program, which is directed against war and capitalism, and which strives to build an international movement of the working class and youth against imperialism.



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