

German government places Socialist Equality Party on subversive watch list

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei
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Last month, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), Germany's domestic intelligence agency, added the Socialist Equality Party to its official list of "left-wing extremist" organizations subject to state monitoring in its annual "constitutional protection report." It is a calculated political attack on the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP).

In previous years, the annual report did not mention the SGP. Now it appears twice—as one of three "left-wing extremist parties" and as an "object of observation," to be monitored by the secret service.

Monitoring by the secret service means massive restriction on basic democratic rights, and is a precursor to a possible ban. The SGP and its members must assume that they are being watched, their communications are being intercepted and they are being spied on by covert means. They are branded as "enemies of the Constitution" and can expect to face harassment in regard to elections, public appearances, renting rooms or looking for a job.

For example, the RCDS, the student organisation of the governing Christian Democratic parties (Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union), demands that organizations and their members that are subject to monitoring by the secret service be excluded from universities.

The secret service has made no accusation that the SGP is breaking any law or is engaged in violent activity. It even explicitly confirms that the SGP pursues its goals by legal means—that it "tries to gain public attention for its political ideas by participating in elections and through lectures."

It justifies the monitoring of the SGP exclusively by the fact that it advocates a socialist program, criticizes capitalism and rejects the establishment parties and the trade unions. The BfV report states: "The agitation of the SGP is directed in its program against the existing state and social order, as a generalized disparagement of 'capitalism,' against the EU, against alleged nationalism, imperialism and militarism and against social democracy, the unions and also against the party DIE LINKE [Left Party]."

The general introduction to the chapter "Left-Wing Extremism" makes clear that the secret service is intent on suppressing any socialist critique of capitalism and its social consequences.

The "ideological basis" of "left-wing extremists," it says, "is the rejection of the 'capitalist system as a whole,' because 'capitalism' is more than just an economic form for left-wing extremists: it is seen as a basis as well as a guarantor of 'bourgeois rule' through 'repression' at home and 'aggression' abroad. 'Capitalism' is therefore responsible for all societal and political ills, such as social injustice, the 'destruction' of housing, wars, right-wing extremism and racism, as well as environmental disasters."

According to the secret service, such a critique of capitalism, which millions of people share, is an attack on "our state and social order and thus liberal democracy." Anyone who bases himself or herself on "Marx, Engels and Lenin" as "leading theoretical figures," or considers the "revolutionary violence" of the "oppressed against the rulers" in principle

as "legitimate" is, in the eyes of the secret service, a "left-wing extremist" and "enemy of the Constitution."

This falls within a tradition of the suppression of socialist parties that has a long and disastrous history in Germany. In 1878, German Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck enacted the infamous Anti-Socialist Law "against the homicidal aspirations of social democracy," which forced the Social Democratic Party (SPD) into illegality for twelve years. In 1933, Hitler first smashed the Communist Party and then the SPD to clear the way for Nazi dictatorship, the Second World War and the extermination of the Jews. Now, the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats and its intelligence agency are preparing a third version of the Anti-Socialist Law. They are adopting the policy of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and threaten anyone who opposes this far-right party with illegality.

Although leading representatives of the AfD regularly agitate against migrants, incite racism, glorify Hitler's Wehrmacht (Army) and downplay the crimes of National Socialism (Nazism), there is not a single mention of this party in the chapter on "right-wing extremism" in the BfV report. This also applies to the representatives of its völkisch-racist wing, the New Right Network and the xenophobic Pegida, which are closely linked with the AfD.

The AfD spokesman in Thuringia, Björn Höcke, against whom the AfD itself has initiated two disciplinary proceedings for making right-wing extremist statements, also does not appear in the report. Neither does the "Institute for State Policy" of neo-right ideologist Götz Kubitschek, the *Compact* magazine of Jürgen Elsässer or the weekly *Junge Freiheit*. The Identarian Movement is mentioned, but only as a "suspicious case."

In the chapter on "left-wing extremism," the AfD is mentioned several times—as the victim of supposed "left-wing extremists"! Those who protest against the AfD and against right-wing extremism or collect information about them are considered to be "left-wing extremists."

"Protests against the two party congresses of the AfD, in April in Cologne and in December in Hanover," are cited in the BfV report as evidence of "extreme left" sentiment. The same applies to the "ongoing fight against right-wing extremists" and the gathering of "information about alleged or actual right-wing extremists and their structures."

Large parts of the BfV report read as if they were written in AfD party headquarters. Many passages bear its imprimatur. It has since been confirmed by the Interior Ministry that BfV head Hans-Georg Maassen met several times with leading AfD representatives. According to the official statement of the ministry, since taking office six years ago, Maassen has conducted "about 196" discussions with politicians from the CDU / CSU, the SPD, the Greens, the Left Party, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and also the AfD.

Maassen's interlocutors include AfD chief Alexander Gauland and his predecessor Frauke Petry. According to a former employee of Petry, Maassen allegedly assured her that he himself "did not wish the AfD to be monitored by the BfV" and advised them on how to avoid such

monitoring. Although Maassen denies this, the fact that the AfD is not mentioned in the BfV report suggests that Petry's colleague was right.

A right-wing conspiracy

The federal government is responsible for the secret service, which answers directly to the interior minister, who wrote the foreword to the BfV report. Without the approval of the grand coalition of the CDU, CSU and SPD, the report could not have appeared in this form. The decision to attack the SGP and support the AfD was taken at the highest levels of the government.

The grand coalition is reacting to the increasing radicalization of the working class and youth, who, by a large majority, reject its policy of permanent welfare cuts, military rearmament and the building of a police state. In the general election last September, the CDU, CSU and SPD had their worst results in 70 years. If elections to the Bundestag (federal parliament) were held today, the grand coalition would no longer have a majority.

Under these conditions, official politics assume the character of a permanent conspiracy that fortifies extreme right-wing forces.

As early as 2013, the formation of a government was preceded by months of behind-the-scenes negotiations culminating in a commitment to militarism. Leading government officials announced the "end of military restraint" and supported the right-wing coup in Ukraine, which sparked a sharp conflict with Russia. Germany has participated in the deployment of NATO forces right up to the Russian border.

This time, the coalition negotiations lasted six months—a historic record. The CDU, CSU and SPD agreed upon the most right-wing program since 1945. They decided on a comprehensive rearmament policy and the establishment of a police state. Military expenditure is expected to increase to 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), which means nearly doubling the military budget. Meanwhile, the reintroduction of compulsory military service and the nuclear armament of the Bundeswehr (armed forces) are also under discussion.

The aspirations of the ruling class to realize its imperialist ambitions by means of military might require the trivialization and revival of the criminal politics of the past. Long before AfD leader Gauland declared the crimes of the Nazis to be merely "bird shit in over a thousand years of successful German history," the then-foreign minister and today's federal president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), proclaimed that Germany was "too big to only comment on world politics from the sidelines." Political scientist Herfried Münkler added: "It's not possible to pursue a responsible policy in Europe if you have the idea that we have been guilty of everything."

In the population, however, the return of German militarism meets with overwhelming opposition, which now coincides with an intensification of the class struggle. After 20 years of social redistribution from those at the bottom to those at the top by both SPD- and CDU-led governments, social relations are torn to shreds. Several labour market reforms have created the largest low-wage sector in Western Europe. Young people are hardly able to find a regular job; only 44 percent of new employees receive a permanent contract. Poverty is exploding. On the other hand, 45 super-rich individuals possess as much wealth as the poorer half of the population.

Many workers and young people can sense that capitalist society is bankrupt and are looking for an alternative. The lectures "200 Years of Karl Marx—The Actuality of Marxism," organized at seven universities by the youth organization of the SGP, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), attracted an audience of a thousand.

The ruling class is responding to this radicalization by returning to the authoritarian policies of the 1930s, cracking down on socialists and adopting the policies of the far right. This crisis is stripping off the "democratic" facade of German capitalism to reveal the original brown paint.

During the Weimar Republic that preceded Nazi rule, the secret service, police and judiciary ruthlessly persecuted socialists and opponents of war and strengthened the Nazis. In 1923, while Hitler was sent to prison for nine months for a bloody coup attempt, where he wrote *Mein Kampf*, the judiciary put the editor of *Weltbühne*, Carl von Ossietzky, in prison for twice as long for anti-militarism. He was then tortured to death.

In the end, Hitler did not come to power through a popular movement, but through a conspiracy within the state apparatus that gathered around Reich President Paul von Hindenburg. The Nazis had suffered a serious defeat in the parliamentary election two months earlier and faced financial bankruptcy. Hardly had Hitler consolidated his power than the judiciary, secret service, police and military seamlessly subordinated themselves to him.

These are the traditions behind which the grand coalition and the secret service are now falling into line. Today, however, they cannot rest upon a fascist mass movement. The AfD is hated by the vast majority of the population. It is a creation of the state, the establishment parties and the media, which are eager to spread its right-wing propaganda. Its leaders stem to a large extent from the CDU, the CSU and the SPD, from the military, the intelligence services, the judiciary and the police.

With its decision to continue the grand coalition despite electoral defeat, the SPD has deliberately strengthened the AfD. Although the AfD received only 12.6 percent of the vote in the federal election, it now leads the opposition in parliament. Its anti-refugee agitation has become the official policy of the grand coalition, which uses it to increase the powers of the state, divide the working class and fuel chauvinism.

The BfV plays a key role in this right-wing conspiracy. It has deep roots in the right-wing swamp. Already 15 years ago, Germany's Supreme Court rejected a ban on the far-right German National Party (NPD) on the grounds that its leadership contained so many BfV undercover informants that the NPD was a "state matter." The close periphery of the National Socialist underground (NSU), which killed nine immigrants and a policewoman between 2000 and 2004, included several dozen active BfV undercover informants. One informant was even present at the scene during a murder, supposedly without noticing anything. The Thuringia Homeland Security, from which the NSU recruited support, was built with funds provided by the BfV.

Defend the SGP

The SGP has become the target of this conspiracy because it consistently advocates a socialist program. It has not adapted to the anti-refugee agitation of the establishment parties nor to the identity politics of the middle class. It is fighting to mobilize the international working class behind a socialist program to overthrow capitalism. As a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, it stands in the tradition of Leon Trotsky's Left Opposition to Stalinism.

The Trotskyist movement fought persistently against the rise of the Nazis in the 1930s. Leon Trotsky's analysis of National Socialism, his warnings of its consequences, and his criticism of the fatal policy of the Stalinist German Communist Party (KPD), which refused to draw a distinction between the SPD and the Nazis and fight for a united front against Hitler, are still of burning relevance and are among the best works ever written on the subject.

The Trotskyists were brutally persecuted by the Nazi secret police, the Gestapo. In 1937, a court in Gdansk sentenced ten Trotskyists to long prison sentences in a show trial. The Trotskyist victims of the Nazis include Abraham Léon, author of a Marxist study of the Jewish question, who conducted illegal socialist work in occupied Belgium and France and was murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. The fact that the Trotskyist movement is being persecuted again, just after the first right-wing extremist party has entered the Bundestag, underscores the shift to the right of official politics.

In contrast to the lies spread by the so-called Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the SGP fully defends democratic rights. The fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution—for the inviolability of life and physical integrity, for equality before the law, freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and the press, the free choice of profession, etc.—remain, however, dead letters and turn into their opposite so long as the economic foundations of society remain in the stranglehold of the private owners of capital. A socialist program is the prerequisite for the realization of real democracy.

If the working class does not overthrow capitalism in the foreseeable future and build a socialist society, a relapse into barbarism and a Third World War is inevitable. This is not only the lesson of the catastrophes of the twentieth century, it is inherent in the tremendous pace with which all the imperialist powers, led by the United States under Donald Trump, are expanding their military forces, intensifying existing wars and preparing new ones.

The BfV has targeted the SGP because its Marxist analysis is being increasingly confirmed. Alarmed by growing opposition to exploitation, inequality, repression, war and right-wing extremism, the BfV and its masters in the grand coalition want to prevent the SGP's socialist program from gaining influence. The BfV report explicitly states that a year ago, the party changed its name from the "Party for Social Equality" to the "Socialist Equality Party" and thus expressed its socialist aims in the party name.

The SGP has for years been the subject of media denunciations for opposing the revision of German history and rehabilitation of the Nazis. When the SGP and the IYSSE criticized right-wing extremist historian Jörg Baberowski, the media unleashed a storm of indignation.

Baberowski defended the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte and publicly declared that Hitler was "not vicious." The IYSSE linked this directly to the return of German militarism. Germany could not return to a policy of militarism, it explained, without developing "a new narrative of the twentieth century," "a falsification of history that diminishes and justifies the crimes of German imperialism."

The criticism of Baberowski found substantial support among students. Numerous student representative bodies agreed with it. The ruling circles were alarmed. The conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* accused the SGP of "mobbing" and complained about its "effectiveness." The presidium of Humboldt University backed up the right-wing extremist professor and declared criticism of him to be "inadmissible." For more than a year, Google, in close consultation with German government circles, has been censoring left-wing, anti-war, and progressive websites, most notably the *World Socialist Web Site*.

From the Left Party and the Greens have come only a cowardly silence, or they have supported Baberowski and the actions of the grand coalition. They do nothing to counter the growing influence of the right wing or even—like the Green Party mayor of Tübingen, Boris Palmer, and the Left Party politicians Sahra Wagenknecht and Oskar Lafontaine—join in its chorus of refugee-baiting.

Even the academic "left," including many followers of the Left Party, have been silent, apart from a few laudable exceptions, and knelt before the right-wing offensive. This did not change even when Baberowski publicly agitated against refugees and founded a discussion group in

Berlin in which numerous figures from the right-wing extremist scene participate.

The BfV's classification of our party as a "left-wing extremist" organization is another attempt to suppress the SGP and its socialist politics. It is aimed at the SGP, but targets anyone who is fighting against social inequality, militarism and oppression and who advocates a socialist perspective.

The SGP will not be intimidated by this attack by the grand coalition and its intelligence agency. It originates from an unpopular government that is despised and rejected by large sections of the population. We reserve the right to take legal action against it. We will continue our work and strengthen our efforts to develop the influence of the SGP among workers, youth and students by all legal means at our disposal. Among other things, we plan to participate in the European elections next spring.

We turn to all those who want to oppose the growth of the right, including serious members of the Left Party, the SPD and the Greens, and call on them to protest against the attack by the BfV and defend the SGP. We demand that the intelligence service cease the monitoring of the SGP and all other left-wing organizations, and that this right-wing hotbed of anti-democratic conspiracies be dissolved.



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