

Promotion of German secret service chief evokes the tradition of the Gestapo

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One day after Hans-Georg Maassen, the former president of Germany's domestic intelligence service (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, BfV) was relieved from his post and promoted to State Secretary in the Interior Ministry, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU) announced Maassen's new responsibilities.

Maassen sparked popular outrage and mass demonstrations when he publicly defended last month's neo-Nazi riot in Chemnitz, denying that the fascists had attacked foreigners. Maassen's fascist statements drew demands that he be fired from his post. But instead, he has been promoted.

At a press conference, Seehofer first praised the ex-intelligence chief for the "close and trusting cooperation" of the past few months and said Maassen had demonstrated "high merit" as head of an important agency. He then announced that Maassen, in his new position as State Secretary at the Interior Ministry, would take over responsibility for three key areas of internal security—the federal police, cyber security and public security.

Maassen will therefore control key areas of the security apparatus and have even more political influence than at his previous job. He will not, however, take over supervision of the BfV. This had been agreed in the coalition committee, Seehofer said. This responsibility will be taken over by another state secretary—Hans-Georg Engelke. Such a division of labor by no means lessens Maassen's future influence in the intelligence services. Both Maassen and Engelke are longstanding members of the Christian Democratic Union and have worked closely together in the past.

In order to make way for Maassen in the Interior Ministry, another State Secretary has been forced into temporary retirement. The man replaced by Maassen, Gunther Adler, is a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), previously responsible for construction and housing. Adler stems from former East Germany, had worked closely with the former SPD federal president Johannes Rau and had made a name for himself as a social reformist. The SPD has protested against Adler's retirement, but Seehofer stated that he alone

decides the appointment of state secretaries in his ministry.

A number of media commentaries have criticised the promotion of Maassen and the reorganisation of the Interior Ministry. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* described the events as a "stimulus program for political disenchantment." The *taz* referred to "Berlin's Days of Chaos" and *Die Zeit* warned of the consequences of an "unsatisfactory compromise", complaining that the federal government threatened to lose any sense of feeling for the popular mood.

No one, however, has explained what is actually going on. Hans-Georg Maassen is a right-winger and supporter of the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Just a few days ago, he told the Interior Committee of the Bundestag he had been a member of the CDU for over 30 years, only confirming the close relationship between the AfD and the CDU. Now the AfD will be able to expand its influence with support from the executive levels of the other Bundestag parties, leading media outlets and the state apparatus. Before taking over as head of the AfD, Alexander Gauland was a member of the CDU for 40 years.

Maassen used his executive post at the BfV to strengthen the AfD and the extreme right-wing circles. He met leading AfD politicians on a number of occasions to give them advice. He swept aside suggestions from some state BfV agencies to name the AfD in the annual secret service report as right-wing extremist and commence surveillance of the party. In fact, it is apparent that he discussed the contents of the BfV report with AfD officials prior to publication.

The AfD's man, Maassen, now has a central post in the Interior Ministry. This strengthens the influence of the AfD in the government and the state apparatus and at the same time underlines the right-wing character of the grand coalition government.

Maassen now assumes responsibility for the federal police, cyber security and public security. In the past, he has repeatedly emphasised that the entire security apparatus must be strengthened and centralised.

Maassen is now the strongman in the Interior Ministry, committed to centralising the different areas of the security

apparatus and building up police-state structures.

A glance at the debates and decisions of the Conference of Interior Ministers last year makes clear what this means. The conference agreed to set up a Joint Counter-Terrorism Center (GTAZ) in Berlin, where representatives of over 40 German security agencies work under one roof.

But leading figures in the grand coalition have demanded even more police-state measures. In particular, they said, more had to be done in the sphere of digital intelligence and a “model police law” should be adopted. The aim is to connect all the databases used by authorities to spy on all persons and groups considered to be suspicious in any way. With the security laws passed last year, it is possible to create entire secret databases that are beyond any democratic oversight.

Another planned measure is so-called online search. It allows the authorities to read hard disks by hacking the computers of “suspects” without the need for physical access. Unlike a house search, involving the confiscation of the disks of suspects, now the person concerned will not know of the online search and therefore be unable to legally defend himself against it.

In future, Maassen will be responsible for this area, so-called cybersecurity. All the information and data collected will land on his desk. He can have them evaluated and passed on to his friends at the AfD, who are already compiling lists of all those opposed to war, critics of capitalism and socialists.

These measures evoke the ghosts of Germany’s past. When the Nazis came to power in January 1933 and a short time later carried out mass arrests, they were able to rely on lists drawn up long before, during the crisis years of the Weimar Republic. No one should believe such a comparison is exaggerated. Today, the greatest danger is to think that the return of a far-right Nazi-type dictatorship is not possible.

Last year Maassen was involved in developing a so-called CDU security paper. Under the title “A strong rule of law for the security of our citizens”, it proposes a catalog of measures that would make any dictator proud. The paper begins with the sentence: “Optimum cooperation between the federal government and the federal states, especially the police, intelligence services and the judiciary, is the key success factor for security in our country.”

The separation of the intelligence services and the police, and their decentralization, was one of the principles of the post-war order in Germany and is specifically ignored in this document. This separation of powers was the main conclusion drawn from the fall of the Nazi regime and the criminal role played by the Gestapo.

The German bourgeoisie did not voluntarily come to this

conclusion at that time; instead it was insisted by the Allied powers in 1949 in the so-called “police letter.” Since Germany regained its full sovereignty with reunification, the validity of such a separation of powers has been increasingly called into question and rejected.

A few weeks after the devastating terror attack on the Berlin Breitscheidplatz—which, as we know today, was carried out under the noses of the BfV—the then Interior Minister, Lothar de Maizière, called upon the government at the beginning of January last year to set up “a controlling authority over all of the security agencies.” The powers of the federal Criminal Police Office and federal police are to be expanded, the state BfV agencies dissolved and integrated into a centralized domestic intelligence service.

In future the federal police, a paramilitary force which emerged from the federal Border Police and was originally responsible only for border security, is to be empowered to carry out nationwide operations. The German army is also to have more power to intervene domestically. “The debates may have been understandable earlier. Now, no more,” threatened Interior Minister de Maizière.

Maassen has now taken over responsibility at the Interior Ministry for advancing and enforcing this right-wing agenda of police-state rearmament. The fact that he is not formally responsible for overseeing the BfV does not alter the fact that he maintains the closest connections to the secret service.

While thousands protest on the streets against Maassen, Seehofer, the AfD and their right-wing racist policies, the ruling parties have agreed to implement this right-wing agenda and establish a police state to suppress growing resistance. The right-wing conspiratorial nature of the grand coalition in Berlin could not be clearer.



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