

Hans-Georg Maassen: A right-wing extremist at the head of the German secret service

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The latest development in the case of Hans-Georg Maassen demonstrates that Germany's domestic intelligence service has been run by an outright right-wing extremist for the past six and a half years.

Maassen was due to be dismissed two months ago as head of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz), after backing a neo-Nazi demonstration in the East German city of Chemnitz. At the time the government decided to entrust him with a leading position at the Interior Ministry, but he continued to remain at his previous post. Now, the German Interior Minister, Horst Seehofer, has sent him into retirement.

On Sunday it was revealed that Maassen had used his position as head of the secret service to maintain his defence of the neo-Nazi demonstration in Chemnitz while denouncing his alleged critics in the government as "left-wing radicals." In a farewell speech to leaders of European intelligence services in Warsaw on 18 October, he described himself as the victim of a conspiracy by "left-wing radical forces" inside the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The speech was then posted in the BfV intranet to be read by Verfassungsschutz employees.

Despite overwhelming proof to the contrary—there is overwhelming evidence that neo-Nazis attacked immigrants, showed the Hitler salute and vandalized a Jewish restaurant—Maassen maintained his version of the Chemnitz events at the meeting in Warsaw.

The claim that neo-Nazis had "chased" foreigners in Chemnitz was "fictitious", he said. "I have already experienced a lot of German media manipulation and Russian disinformation. But that politicians and media freely invent a 'chase'—or at least spread this misinformation unchecked—represents for me a new quality of fake reporting in Germany."

He had told the appropriate German parliamentary committees that "a struggle against right-wing extremism does not justify inventing right-wing extremist crimes," Maassen bragged. In response "the media, Green and leftist politicians" had called for his dismissal because they felt that "due to me they had been caught out with their fake reporting."

For "left-wing radical forces in the SPD," Maassen continued, his case provided an opportunity "to provoke the break-up of this coalition government." He had also been forced out of office by his political opponents and sections of the media because he was "known in Germany to be a critic of an idealistic, naïve and left-wing immigrant and security policy."

On Monday afternoon, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer placed Maassen in temporary retirement—after thanking him for his "good services." Up to that point, Seehofer had consistently defended him. As a retired senior civil servant Maassen will receive 72 percent of his previous salary for the next three years and at least 35 percent for the rest of his life. Seehofer could have dismissed him on the grounds of a serious dereliction of duty.

Maassen's departure and the displays of indignation by some politicians from the government and opposition camp about his recent remarks serve, above all, to cover their own tracks. Maassen's right-wing extremist views were not only well known, they were desired. His task was to pave the way for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), in order to impose the government's antisocial and militaristic policies in the face of growing opposition from the working class and youth. Maassen was part of the political conspiracy with which the ruling elites are enforcing highly unpopular policies.

This is particularly clear in the official annual report

of the Secret Service, which Maassen presented this summer alongside Interior Minister Seehofer. The AfD and its far-right milieu are ignored in the report, while any criticism of capitalism is branded as “left-wing extremism”.

The “ideological basis” of “left-wing extremists,” it states, is “the rejection of the “capitalist system” as a whole. In particular, the report states that “left-wing extremists” blame capitalism 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.”

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) is noted in the report for the first time as a “left-wing extremist party” and “object for observation”, because it opposes “the EU, alleged nationalism, imperialism and militarism”.

No political organization besides the SGP protested against this report, which places all opposition to capitalism and its consequences—war, social inequality, right-wing extremism, and nationalism—into the murky category of “hostility to the constitution,” and threatens it with legal prohibition. Now it is clear that Maassen, who had met with leading representatives of the AfD and drew up the report with them, himself supports the political line of the AfD.

It is not without irony that he is now also denouncing the SPD as “left-wing extremist”—the very same party that has always vigorously defended the Verfassungsschutz and its anti-democratic methods and which has itself provided its president for many years.

Maassen has worked for the Ministry of the Interior since 1991 and was a close associate of Otto Schily (SPD), who headed the ministry from 1998 to 2005. In 2002, under Schily’s rule, Maassen ensured that Murat Kurnaz, who had grown up in the German city of Bremen, was detained for three years longer than necessary in the US Guantanamo Bay detention center, although Kurnaz had committed no crime.

The Greens and the Left Party have also supported Maassen. In 2013 the Left Party invited him to address a public meeting, where Left Party politicians cheerfully chatted with the head of the German secret service on a couch.

A right-wing figure like Maassen was only able to stay at the helm of the BfV for six and a half years because he had broad support from within the secret service itself and from leading political circles. Even

now, none of the parties has called for the dissolution of the secret service or even a purge of its leadership, although it is well known that not only Maassen, but also many of his employees, are politically close to the AfD, and that the Verfassungsschutz effectively runs and finances Germany’s neo-Nazi scene via its undercover agents.

Instead, all of the parties are anxious to continue Maassen’s right-wing policies without him. His successor is the BfV’s previous deputy, Thomas Haldenwang, who worked closely with Maassen.

Green Party deputy Konstantin von Notz praised Haldenwang in the highest tones. “I’m looking forward to working with you,” he said. “I wish the new president a good hand to tackle things with determination and restore lost confidence.”

Little information has emerged from the gathering of European intelligence chiefs in Warsaw but one can assume, based on Maassen’s own words, that his right-wing course had their support. He had “enjoyed listening to this circle” and had experienced “a high degree of collegiality and solidarity,” he said. “I have found that we have the same goals, share the same values and fight against the same opponents of freedom and democracy.”

Maassen also hinted to the gathering of senior intelligence officials that he was considering going into politics himself, but did not indicate for which party. For its part the AfD was jubilant. “He is an outstanding official committed to a high work ethic and has the courage to pronounce even uncomfortable truths,” declared AfD leader Jörg Meuthen. “Of course, if he had any interest in joining us, he would be welcome.”



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