

Former head of German Secret Service publishes fascist manifesto

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei
7 December 2019

Hans-Georg Maassen, who headed the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz), Germany's domestic secret service, from 2012 to 2018, has published an article in the right-wing Swiss magazine *Die Weltwoche* that can only be described as a fascist manifesto. *Die Weltwoche* is the unofficial house organ of the right-wing populist and anti-immigrant Swiss People's Party. Roger Köppel, who has headed the newspaper since 2001, is a deputy in the Swiss parliament for the People's Party.

In a piece entitled "Germany needs a change of course," Maassen warns that "Germany's future and the stability of our democracy" are under threat from "socialism." Thirty years ago, the West German elites "underestimated the dangers of socialist ideology," he writes. "In the euphoria of unification, they assumed that socialism was defeated and the opponent was giving up their weapons. It was, in my view, a naive opinion for which there was no justification."

Maassen justifies his warning with a list of 10 points that sound as though they had been lifted directly from the programme of the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD). He does not mention the danger from the right even once. For the former secret service head, the strengthening of the far-right AfD, the murders committed by the right-wing terrorist group National Socialist Underground (NSU), the murder of Kassel district president Walter Lübcke, the attack on a synagogue in Halle, the right-wing networks in the police and armed forces, and the death threats against Jews, human rights activists, lawyers and politicians do not represent a threat to democracy.

Instead, he concludes his piece with a thinly-veiled call for the formation of a fascist movement. "We have to be braver, and we have to mobilise the citizens," he writes.

The Verfassungsschutz's attack on the SGP

Maassen has authored a text confirming everything that we said about the importance of the Verfassungsschutz's targeting of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP). As the president of the Verfassungsschutz (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution), Maassen bore direct responsibility for the classification of the SGP as a "left-wing extremist party" and "object of observation" in the Verfassungsschutz Report of 2017.

We warned at the time that this attack on the SGP was aimed at "any socialist critique of capitalism and its consequences," and that it drew on the tradition of suppressing socialist movements from Bismarck's anti-socialist laws to the destruction of the Communist and Social Democratic parties under the Third Reich.

The Verfassungsschutz explicitly stated that the SGP pursues its activities by legal means and did not accuse it of illegal or violent actions.

The sole justification given for including the SGP in the report was its socialist programme. The Verfassungsschutz declared "the advocacy of a democratic, egalitarian and socialist society," the "agitation against so-called 'imperialism' and 'militarism,'" and "thinking in class categories" and "belief in irreconcilably opposed classes" to be unconstitutional.

In his *Weltwoche* piece, Maassen now denounces anyone who bases himself in even the most tangential way on socialism, and declares anyone who does not celebrate reunification and German imperialism with flag-waving nationalism to be a threat to Germany's future. He does not even leave out the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Left Party from his criticism.

He accuses the SPD of having done too little to achieve German unification 30 years ago. "The West German intellectuals and left-wing politicians recoiled in terror when the Germans in the GDR (German Democratic Republic—East Germany) began chanting 'We are one people' in early 1990," he writes. "The left-wing establishment not only gave up on reunification, but were no longer prepared to fight for the values of the Federal Republic. In my view, this is one of the darkest chapters of the German left and Social Democracy in particular."

Maassen charges that the Left Party has been "inexplicably trivialised in public discourse." In reality, he states, "the SED [the former Stalinist party of government in the GDR], which today calls itself the Left Party, enjoys an astonishing continuity both in its ideology and personnel to the SED dictatorship."

The former secret service head is resorting to the anti-communist rhetoric of the Cold War to pave the way for a fascist movement capable of intimidating and ruthlessly suppressing mounting opposition from within the working class and youth.

With his reference to the "underestimated threat of socialist ideology," he means the growing interest among workers and young people in socialist ideas, their opposition to capitalism, militarism, and right-wing extremism, and their readiness to take to the streets to achieve their goals. He fears that the SGP, which as the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International has defended Marxian socialism against both capitalism and Stalinism, will win a hearing among them.

Maassen and the grand coalition

Maassen is by no means an isolated figure who has lost his mind. He was appointed to the presidency of the Verfassungsschutz in August 2012 because he was well known for his right-wing political views.

Since 1991, the jurist had enjoyed a high-flying career in the Interior Ministry, having secured promotions under ministers from the Christian Democrats (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and SPD. Already in his

doctoral thesis in 1997, titled “The legal position of asylum seekers in international law,” Maassen argued in favour of an extremely restrictive refugee policy. Under SPD Interior Minister Otto Schily, he ensured that Murat Kurnaz, who was originally from Bremen, could not return to Germany, forcing him to remain confined without charge in the US Guantanamo Bay prison camp.

He was ultimately appointed president of the Verfassungsschutz to cover up that body's close ties to violent neo-Nazi networks. Shortly prior to Maassen's appointment, news broke of the 10 racist murders and numerous bomb attacks and bank robberies carried out by the right-wing terrorist National Socialist Underground (NSU) between 2000 and 2007, under the nose of the Verfassungsschutz. At least 12 informants for the spy agency had close ties to the NSU's supporters, but all claimed they had noticed nothing.

Maassen assumed the task of defending and retaining this wide-ranging network of spies, which he managed to do. Stephan E., who shot Kassel district president Walter Lübcke on June 2 of this year, was part of the same far-right network as the NSU, and was, like the NSU, in close contact with Verfassungsschutz informants.

Maassen's sympathies for the AfD and his ties to the party were well known prior to the grand coalition's reluctant decision last year to send him into early retirement. The role that he and the Verfassungsschutz played and are continuing to play in the rise of the AfD underscores that the growth of this far-right party is the result of a conspiracy within the ruling elite. “It cannot be comprehended without analysing the role of the government, the state apparatus, the political parties, the media and the ideologues at the universities,” wrote SGP deputy leader Christoph Vandreier in his book *Why Are They Back?*

Maassen repeatedly met for secret talks with leading members of the AfD while he was Verfassungsschutz president. But this did not hinder his career. When he defended a right-wing extremist rampage in Chemnitz in the autumn of 2018, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (CSU) and the SPD leader at the time, Andrea Nahles, wanted to promote him to a higher position within the Interior Ministry. Only after denouncing his own government at a meeting of European intelligence agencies in Warsaw was he sent into early retirement.

However, this did not change the role of the Verfassungsschutz one bit. The close connections between far-right forces and the security agencies continue to be covered up under Maassen's successor, the CDU's Thomas Haldenwang. The latest edition of the Verfassungsschutz Report mentions the SGP once again as a left-wing extremist party, while the AfD and its far-right periphery, including Pegida, Björn Höcke's “faction” within the AfD, and the magazines *Kompakt* and *Junge Freiheit*, are referred to sympathetically as supposed targets of so-called “left-wing extremists.”

Maassen as a right-wing agitator

Since being sent into early retirement with a substantial state pension, Maassen has repeatedly appeared in public as a far-right agitator. He continues to be a member of the CDU, where he represents the hard-right “Values Union.” But his politics differ little from those of the AfD, with which he is striving to collaborate. During the campaigns for state elections in Saxony and Thuringia, he was celebrated by AfD and Pegida members at his appearances.

The 10 points he lists in *Die Weltwoche* to justify his warning against the threat of socialism are also pure AfD propaganda. For example, Maassen claims, “freedom of speech is no longer guaranteed in Germany,” because one “can't say anything bad about foreigners without

immediately being denounced as a racist.” He complains about allegedly left-leaning media outlets, writing: “The vast majority of German journalists sympathise with left-wing parties, but the distribution among ordinary citizens appears very different.”

The former secret service president denounces the turn to renewable energy sources as a loss of reality and “religious spiritualism.” Maassen denounces as a “moralisation of politics” any politics based on moral categories, such as “philanthropy, humanity, standing up to hate, evil, and so on.” “Society must once again return to the rule of politics and law, and restrict morality to a private affair where it belongs,” he adds.

Maassen also attacks the German government's “asylum and security policies” for spreading fear, because they make people feel “like they're not the boss in their own house.” The integration of two million asylum seekers has “largely isolated Germany in Europe,” “contributed to the division of Europe,” and resulted in “criminality and terrorism,” he declares.

Maassen complains that “political opponents” are “treated as enemies who are not allowed to speak, who one is not allowed to have contact with, who can be excluded, stigmatised, isolated, and discredited.” His idea of “political opponents” includes only right-wing extremists. By contrast, he wants to censor left-wing or liberal viewpoints. Further on, he expresses “the justifiable concern that ideology is being taught in schools, whether with regard to climate or refugee policy.”

The article once again underscores why the Verfassungsschutz included the SGP on its list of anti-constitutional organisations. Maassen finds it “horrifying and shameful that the university professoriate allows colleagues with views outside of the left-wing political mainstream to be silenced by left-wing extremist students, and that university administrations throw up their hands in innocence, while those targeted are left to confront a left-wing mob alone.”

Maassen does not name names, but he is clearly referring to the right-wing extremist Berlin-based historian Jörg Baberowski. The SGP and its youth organisation, the IYSSE, denounced Baberowski publicly in 2014 because he supported the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte in *Der Spiegel* and claimed that Hitler was “not vicious.” We warned that this justification of the Nazis' crimes was closely connected with the government's drive to end what it called decades of German military restraint. We wrote, “The revival of German militarism requires a new interpretation of history that downplays the crimes of the Nazi era.”

Since then, the defence of Baberowski has become a touchstone for anyone advocating the revival of German militarism. The Humboldt University administration, a series of professors and virtually all media outlets have backed the right-wing extremist Baberowski and unleashed an aggressive campaign targeting the SGP. Meanwhile, Baberowski has continued to agitate through all media channels against refugees, and a court has ruled that it is legitimate to describe him as a right-wing extremist.

By contrast, the SGP and IYSSE have won broad support among students. Many student representative bodies have passed resolutions against the right-wing extremist professor. Students are now experiencing for themselves how any criticism of right-wing extremism is being suppressed at the universities. Students at Hamburg University recently experienced this when they protested against the return of AfD founder Berndt Lucke to the university.

Support the SGP's lawsuit against the Verfassungsschutz

Maassen's fascist manifesto sheds fresh light on the far-right conspiracy within the German state and security apparatus. As we have seen, the

reactionary views he now propagates in the house organ of one of Europe's largest right-wing populist parties are not merely a recent development. Nonetheless, he was promoted by the CDU, CSU and SPD, and entrusted with leading the main domestic intelligence agency.

The reason for this is to be found in fundamental changes in capitalist society. The dramatic polarisation of society between rich and poor and the rise of trade wars and conflicts between the major powers have destroyed the basis for the social and political compromises that characterised Europe in the post-war era. The ruling elites around the world are responding by lurching ever further to the right. They are preparing new wars and developing new forms of authoritarian rule. The rise of Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Viktor Orban in Hungary are only the clearest expressions of this trend.

In Germany, the third grand coalition under Chancellor Angela Merkel has adopted the most right-wing programme since the foundation of the German Federal Republic. The military budget is being increased to at least €70 billion by 2024, refugee policy follows the line of the AfD, and the apparatus of police-state surveillance has been expanded and strengthened. This is the way in which the government is preparing to suppress opposition to militarism and mounting class struggles, which are developing as a result of impending mass layoffs in the auto industry, terrible working conditions in the private and public sectors, the increase in rents and the growth of poverty.

The struggle against the far-right danger must proceed on the basis of this understanding. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei and its international sister parties are the only political tendency that is firmly resisting this rightward lurch. The SGP's lawsuit against the Verfassungsschutz is an important step in resisting the right-wing conspiracy in the state apparatus. We call upon WSWs readers to support us in this fight.

We base our struggle against fascism, social inequality and war on the mobilisation of the working class on a socialist programme. The capitalist crisis is not only producing a rightward shift by the ruling elite, but also bringing the working class back onto the stage of world history as a powerful social force, as the growing number of strikes and mass protests around the globe has shown. But these movements need a socialist perspective and political leadership.



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