

Defend the daily newspaper *junge Welt* against attack by Germany's secret service

Christoph Vandreier

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In September, the left-wing daily newspaper *junge Welt* filed a lawsuit against the Federal Republic of Germany because it has been under surveillance by the intelligence agencies for years and is listed in the “left-wing extremism” chapter of the secret service’s annual report.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) welcomes and fully supports the lawsuit. Our political differences with *junge Welt* are well known, but this is a fundamental attack on democratic rights and on every socialist organization.

The accusation of anti-constitutionality against *junge Welt* lacks any foundation. In its justification, the federal government makes clear that its goal is to criminalize anyone who even verbally refers to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels or speaks out against military rearmament and right-wing extremism.

Even being named in the report by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz), as Germany’s secret service is called, is an attack on the democratic rights of an organization or newspaper. As *junge Welt* reports, it faces significant restrictions on freedom of trade. “For example, national rail operator Deutsche Bahn and various municipalities and radio stations refuse to take out advertising with reference to the *Verfassungsschutz* entry, libraries block online access to the newspaper, and a printing company has refused to produce another print publication containing an advert from *junge Welt*,” the paper’s editorial team explains.

In addition, surveillance by the intelligence agencies—including the covert monitoring of communications, the use of informers and secret searches of computers—jeopardizes the protection of sources and a newspaper’s editorial confidentiality.

Besides the lawsuit, the newspaper has applied for a temporary injunction to prohibit the Verfassungsschutz from continuing to publish reports mentioning *junge Welt*. Since the Berlin Administrative Court granted an extension of the deadline, no response to the lawsuit has yet been filed. However, the government had already justified surveillance of *junge Welt* in detail on May 5 in its answer to a parliamentary question tabled by the Left Party in the Bundestag.

In it, the federal government repeats the same anti-democratic argumentation of *Gesinnungsjustiz* (justice based on opinions) that it developed to justify the surveillance of the SGP. It does not accuse *junge Welt* of conducting or preparing any illegal actions, but justifies the alleged anti-constitutionality exclusively with the ‘basic Marxist convictions’ of the editorial staff. This “contains as its essential goal the replacement of liberal democracy with a socialist/communist social order,” according to the government. This is proven supposedly by the fact that *junge Welt* makes positive references to Marx, Engels, Lenin, Liebknecht and Luxemburg.

Elsewhere, the government accuses *junge Welt* of a “fundamental critique of capitalism,” declaring, “Capitalism and the political and social order of the Federal Republic—which, according to Marxist readings, arises from it—are fundamentally rejected. Authors of the corresponding contributions see solutions to existing political and economic crises in an abolition of ‘capitalism’, identified as causal.”

According to this hair-raising reading, it is not democratic rights such as freedom of speech or democratic elections that form the basis of the free democratic order, but ownership of the means of production and the exploitation of the working class. For this is what is to be abolished under socialism. Anyone who questions the interests of the super-rich is to be criminalized. According to this logic, 56.3 percent of Berliners would also have to be included in the secret service report because they recently voted in favour of expropriating the housing corporations in a referendum on the city’s high rents.

This becomes even clearer when the government claims that even categorising the “division of a society according to the characteristics of production-oriented class membership” contradicts the free democratic order and human dignity. Accordingly, it is not poverty wages, homelessness or malnutrition that contradict human dignity, but the naming of this glaring social inequality!

While the government is responsible for the greatest levels of social inequality in history and pushes through ruthless “profits before lives” policies in the pandemic, it stamps everyone who calls out these class politics by their name to be an enemy of the constitution.

What is significant here is that it is attacking a press

publication, *junge Welt*. The fact is that publishing opinions of any kind is not enough to justify surveillance by the secret service. According to the *Bundesverfassungsschutzgesetz* (Federal Law for the Protection of the Constitution), a group of persons must be shown to have engaged in purposeful conduct aimed at eliminating or impairing the object of protection under the law for the protection of the constitution.

The government attempts to construe such conduct by pointing to the newspaper's organization of conferences and conducting interviews with representatives of groups such as the Colombian FARC-EP or Palestinian representatives. But these absurd constructs cannot disguise the fact that what we are really dealing with here is pure *Gesinnungsjustiz*. The newspaper has come into the cross-hairs of the authorities solely because it expresses opinions which the authorities oppose.

At the same time, the government openly admits its aim is to obstruct the newspaper's circulation and thus attack the freedom of the press. According to the government, the aim of naming the newspaper in the secret service report is precisely "to inform the public about anti-constitutional endeavours in order to be able to deprive them of a further breeding ground."

The government's renewed attempt to criminalize any positive references to Karl Marx or other Marxists, as well as "sweeping criticism of capitalism," and even the naming of class antagonisms, confirms the perspective put forward by the SGP in its fight against its surveillance by the intelligence agencies and naming in the *Verfassungsschutz* annual report.

The SGP filed a lawsuit with the Berlin Administrative Court on January 24, 2019, after it was listed in the "left-wing extremism" chapter of the *Verfassungsschutz* report for the first time in 2018. The intelligence agency justified the party's inclusion solely on the grounds that it advocates a socialist programme, criticizes capitalism and rejects the establishment parties and trade unions.

In its response to the legal complaint, the government then developed, for the first time, the anti-democratic argumentation that is now also being used against *junge Welt*. Thus, it declared the "struggle for a democratic, egalitarian, socialist society" and the "agitation against alleged 'imperialism' and 'militarism'" alone to be unconstitutional. Also, "thinking in class categories" and the "belief in the existence of irreconcilably opposing competing classes" were presented in the response to the SGP as an attack on the free democratic order.

In its reply, the SGP showed that the government and the *Verfassungsschutz* were taking this line directly from Bismarck's anti-socialist laws and the Nazis' *Willensstrafrecht*, and were pursuing an extreme right-wing agenda. "The report of the *Verfassungsschutz* and the document of the lawyers of the Interior Ministry are products of a right-wing extremist conspiracy in the state apparatus aimed at intimidating public opinion and criminalizing all opposition

to capitalism, nationalism, imperialism, militarism and the AfD [far-right Alternative for Germany] as 'left-wing extremist' and 'anti-constitutional,'" the SGP said.

It added that the *Verfassungsschutz* is itself closely intertwined with the far-right scene. "With its attack on the SGP, this criminal government agency wants to set a precedent for a new kind of legal prosecution of thought crimes that would provide the basis for the prosecution of anyone who criticises the current reactionary social and political situation. Striking workers would be prosecuted as well as book sellers who make available Marxist literature, or critical artists, journalists and intellectuals."

This warning has been confirmed by the government's anti-democratic tract against *junge Welt*. Last year, the environmentalist "Ende Gelände" movement was already placed under surveillance by the Berlin state secret service because, among other things, it linked protecting the environment with the "thematic fields of anti-capitalism and anti-fascism," according to the intelligence agency. Music bands and concerts against the right were also defamed as "left-wing extremist" because they oppose the right wing.

Under these conditions, the SGP's legal complaint against its surveillance by the *Verfassungsschutz* takes on extraordinary significance. In our statement regarding the oral hearing, which is scheduled for November 18, we wrote:

We call on all those who defend democratic rights and want to oppose the far right to sign the SGP's petition on change.org. Post statements of support, pictures and videos on social media with the hashtag #DefendSGP. The surveillance of the SGP and all other left-wing groups by the secret services must be halted immediately, and this right-wing breeding ground for anti-democratic conspiracies disbanded.

We reiterate this demand for the dissolution of the *Verfassungsschutz* and call for the immediate removal of *junge Welt* from its annual report.



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