

How Germany's domestic intelligence agency promotes the far right

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Germany's leading weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel* recently published a long background article about Hans-Georg Maassen, the head of Germany's domestic intelligence agency (Verfassungsschutz) from 2012 to 2018. The article posed the question: "...did Maassen become radicalised after his involuntary departure from the top post, or had he previously developed his penchant for ultra-right positions? To what extent did Maassen politically influence the Verfassungsschutz?"

In fact, the answer to this question has been clear for a long time. Maassen was agitating against Germany's asylum laws and refugees even before these themes were taken up by the country's far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). As head of the Verfassungsschutz, Maassen met on several occasions with AfD leaders to help them evade surveillance by the agency he headed. The German government was finally forced to send Maassen into temporary retirement in November 2018 after he spoke out in defence of a far-right demonstration in the city of Chemnitz—an act that provoked a storm of protest.

At the same time that Maassen was protecting and promoting far-right extremists, he clamped down hard on anti-fascists, opponents of war and socialists. It was Maassen who was responsible for listing the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP—Socialist Equality Party) as a "left-wing extremist" organisation in the Verfassungsschutz's annual report, subjecting it to official surveillance, because—as the Federal Interior Ministry later argued—the party opposes "capitalism, alleged nationalism, imperialism and militarism."

Meanwhile, Maassen is so deeply immersed in the far-right camp that, as *Der Spiegel* writes, this is "not only a problem for the CDU [Christian Democratic Union] but also for the agency Hans-Georg Maassen headed for six years" and increased in size from 1,100 to 3,500 employees. "Maassen is tarnishing the office," one security official is quoted as saying.

Maassen has been blatantly flaunting his fascist nostrums during his retirement, while drawing a state pension estimated at 6,000 euros a month. He has whitewashed attacks on defenceless refugees, spread far-right conspiracy theories, called for a "ban on COVID vaccinations" and raged against the "dangers of socialist ideology" and the alleged destruction of society by those on the left.

Maassen is a member of the Christian Democratic Union and temporarily joined the WerteUnion (Union of Values). The chairman of the ultra-conservative WerteUnion is Max Otte, who is running as the AfD's official candidate for the post of president of Germany. Maassen has also published articles in *Junge Freiheit*, the central organ of Germany's New Right, and is active on the social network Gettr, a platform of the Alt-Right movement.

"Day by day, Maassen seems to be plunging deeper into the world of right-wing ideologues and conspiracy advocates," *Der Spiegel* writes. Maassen's successor at the Verfassungsschutz and his deputy for many years, Thomas Haldenwang, is trying to "distance himself as much as possible from his former boss." According to the magazine, Haldenwang

"declared that a firm course would be taken against old and new far-right extremists in the country. But each new provocation by Maassen undermines his efforts."

Der Spiegel is visibly trying to assist Haldenwang. If Maassen has already ruined his own reputation, then at least the reputation of the Verfassungsschutz must be saved. The journalists at *Der Spiegel* "spoke with active and former employees of both the federal- and state-run Verfassungsschutz" and "evaluated documents classified as secret and confidential from Maassen's time in office." The authors of the article take great pains to reveal only what is already common knowledge, but the balance of their report is nevertheless devastating.

A mere summary of the facts makes clear that the Verfassungsschutz is a hotbed of the type of far right-wing extremism it is supposed to combat. The AfD and the country's militant neo-Nazi scene owe their successes largely to the complicity of the Verfassungsschutz. Any serious fight against the dangers emanating from the far right must begin with the dismantling of this opaque and conspiratorial agency.

Support from interior ministers from all parties

Maassen is only the most obvious expression of a much broader problem. Although—or because—his right-wing views were known early on, he was promoted and supported by a series of interior ministers and all of Germany's parliamentary parties.

He began his career under Otto Schily (Social Democratic Party—SPD), the interior minister of the SPD-Green government at the time. Under Schily, Maassen became department head in the Federal Interior Ministry. He ensured that Murat Kurnaz, who was born and grew up in Germany, was not allowed to return to Germany and had to spend five years in the notorious US Guantánamo prison camp although he had committed no crime.

In 2012, Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich (Christian Social Union—CSU) appointed Maassen to head the Verfassungsschutz in order to cover up the scandal surrounding the NSU (National Socialist Underground) terror group. Shortly before Maassen's appointment, a trio of neo-Nazis had been exposed after a reign of terror, during which they committed 10 racist murders, several bombings and a number of bank robberies, all carried out under the noses of the security authorities. Although dozens of undercover agents were active in the milieu around the NSU, the Verfassungsschutz claimed to have known nothing about the fascist group's activities and destroyed relevant secret files.

As soon as he took office, even Germany's Left Party opened its doors to Maassen and invited him to take part in a public meeting in Berlin.

As new head of the Verfassungsschutz, Maassen paraded himself as "Mister Clean" and announced a "day of opening up of the safes." The

secret files were to be opened and inventoried.

Based on its research, *Der Spiegel* concludes that “the action was never carried out.” The neo-Nazi network remained intact. Stephan Ernst, who assassinated the Kassel district president Walter Lübcke in 2019, was part of this network. Ernst had known the members of the NSU personally and, like them, was in close contact with undercover agents of the Verfassungsschutz.

Friedrich’s successors as federal interior minister, Thomas de Maizière (CDU) and Horst Seehofer (CSU) also protected Maassen. When Maassen, together with his friend, federal police chief Dieter Romann, denounced Chancellor Angela Merkel’s refugee policy to news editors in 2015, de Maizière did not dare to dispatch his disloyal official into retirement. According to *Der Spiegel*, de Maizière allowed Maassen to “increasingly pursue his own agenda and align his domestic intelligence service accordingly.”

Horst Seehofer even wanted to promote Maassen and make him state secretary for security in the Interior Ministry when it was clear he was no longer tenable as head of the domestic intelligence service. In his new post, Maassen would have been responsible for all of the country’s security agencies. Only after strong protests did Seehofer abandon his plan and send Maassen into temporary retirement.

Seehofer continued his efforts to protect the AfD after Maassen’s departure. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported on January 21 of this year that the interior minister personally intervened a year ago to water down an 800-page confidential report on the AfD by the Verfassungsschutz. In particular, Seehofer was not prepared to classify Islamophobic and xenophobic statements as examples of far-right extremism.

For years, Maassen had refused to take up the question of the AfD and its neo-Nazi “völkisch” wing, led by Björn Höcke, although, according to *Der Spiegel*’s research, several state Verfassungsschutz agencies favoured such a course. In 2015, prior to the AfD taking seats in the Bundestag (German federal parliament), Maassen met with the then-AfD party leader Frauke Petry on at least two occasions. According to *Der Spiegel*, there is “the suspicion that Maassen gave the party tips on how it could avoid being targeted by the agencies.”

Maassen denies this took place, but all of the circumstantial evidence points to it having happened. Between the two meetings with Petry, for which there are no minutes, Maassen attended a conference of the Saarland interior ministry, where surveillance of the particularly radical Saarland AfD was discussed. Shortly afterwards, Petry met again with Maassen and dissolved the Saarland state association.

According to *Der Spiegel*, Maassen also prevented surveillance of Götz Kubitschek’s Institute for State Policy, an ideological cadre school for the New Right, members of the Identitarian movement and völkisch AfD members.

The new interior minister is brought into line

Meanwhile, it is the fascist Höcke wing that dominates the AfD. After party founder Bernd Lucke and Frauke Petry, Jörg Meuthen is the third leading official in the AfD to resign. Meuthen resigned at the end of January, arguing that the party had moved too far to the right. It was the protective hand of Maassen and Seehofer that enabled the openly fascist wing to increasingly dominate the AfD.

The situation has not changed under Haldenwang. The Verfassungsschutz is a state within a state. It has long since evaded any democratic control. This has been confirmed by the recent attacks on the new interior minister, Nancy Faeser (SPD).

Faeser has been heavily criticised because she published an article last

summer in the magazine of the Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime/Federation of Antifascists (VVN-BdA). The article dealt with the death threats signed “NSU 2.0” sent to Faeser in her previous function as chair of the SPD in the state of Hesse.

The VVN-BdA carries out anti-fascist education. Among its best-known members was the recently deceased Auschwitz survivor Esther Bejarano. The organisation also includes other surviving victims of the Nazi regime and former concentration camp inmates, including members of the German Communist Party (DKP, the successor organisation to the KPD, which was ruthlessly suppressed by the Nazis).

Because of the presence of DKP members, the VVN-BdA continues to be spied on by the Verfassungsschutz at the federal level and in the states of North Rhine-Westphalia, Hamburg and Baden-Württemberg. The Bavarian Verfassungsschutz goes so far as to describe the VVN-BdA in its report as the “largest left-wing extremist-influenced organisation active in the field of anti-fascism in Germany.” This means that education about the crimes of the Nazis is considered to be illegal and anti-constitutional.

Because of her article, Faeser has been accused of cooperating with a “left-wing extremist” organisation. The first to make this accusation was *Junge Freiheit*, the central organ of the extreme right. The yellow press *Bild - Zeitung* and several CDU deputies then eagerly took up the campaign.

In fact, even the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* attests that Faeser is “not on the left, but rather on the right wing of the SPD.” It writes: “The fully qualified lawyer did not, after all, work in a large international law firm in Frankfurt’s banking district in order to destroy capitalism from within.” The newspaper continues: “She was able to earn good money there and had a job that many a supporter of the [free market] FDP [Free Democratic Party] could only dream of. Faeser is one of the social democrats who appeals to more conservative voters.”

Faeser will react to these attacks in the same manner as all social democratic ministers since Gustav Noske, who ordered the bloody repression of revolutionary workers and sailors during the November Revolution of 1918. Instead of seeking to contain right-wing forces in the state apparatus, she will invariably seek their confidence by proving her own reliability to them.

Only the mobilisation of the working class can put an end to the right-wing conspiracy in the state apparatus. In this context, the legal complaint of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party–SGP) against the Verfassungsschutz is of great importance.

The SGP is not prepared to accept the assault by the domestic intelligence agency on its democratic rights, which continues unabated after Maassen’s departure. The SGP has therefore sued the Interior Ministry and appealed the decision of the Administrative Court of Berlin, which ruled in favour of the Verfassungsschutz.

We call on all WSWS readers to support the SGP’s lawsuit. Sign our petition, donate to our legal costs and circulate the information dealing with the lawsuit.



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