

Germany's Reichsbürger terrorist network and the fight against fascism

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The resurgence of a fascist movement in Germany is a matter of grave concern. There is no other country in which fascism has shown its barbaric face with such sadistic brutality. During the 12 years of the Nazi dictatorship, from 1933 to 1945, Hitler smashed the workers' movement, established a regime of terror, and unleashed a war of conquest and extermination that claimed 27 million victims in the Soviet Union alone and murdered six million Jews. By the time of Hitler's demise, Germany and half of Europe lay in ruins.

The more than 50 people from the Reichsbürger (Citizens of the Reich) movement against whom 3,000 police officers carried out the largest raid in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany are not harmless “crackpots,” as some now claim. Following the police sweep on December 7, the Federal Public Prosecutor accused them of establishing a terrorist group to seize power by military force and kill political opponents.

They are said to have planned to invade the federal parliament (Bundestag), following the example of the attempted coup in Washington D.C. led by former American President Donald Trump on January 6, 2021. Their aim was allegedly to imprison members of parliament and the government, provoke unrest throughout Germany and overthrow the government.

The terrorist network extends deeply into the state apparatus and elite social circles. The detainees include a member of the high nobility, a lawyer, a doctor, a pilot and a judge and former Bundestag delegate for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). There are also several police officers and a significant number of former and active members of the military, including several officers of the Special Forces Command (KSK), an elite army unit that is trained to kill and take hostages.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. According to members of the Bundestag's Legal Affairs Committee who were informed of the investigations, hundreds of people signed the group's “confidentiality declaration.” Preparations were made for the establishment of 280 “homeland security companies” tasked with “arresting and executing” people in the event of a coup.

The network is intertwined with the AfD, which sits in the Bundestag and the state parliaments. It is based on COVID deniers, QAnon supporters, “lateral thinkers”—a title adopted by

opponents of COVID public health measures—and Reichsbürger. The latter group alone is estimated to consist of 23,000 people, one in 10 of whom is prepared to commit violence. Reichsbürger deny the existence of the Federal Republic of Germany and strive for the restoration of the German Empire within Germany's 1937 borders, i.e., including large parts of Poland and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.

The right-wing terrorist networks have not fallen from the sky. The Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei—SGP) has been warning about their development for many years. In 2018, Mehring Verlag published the book *Why are they back?* by Christoph Vandreier, the current chairman of the SGP. The book demonstrates in detail “how in the last five years the return of German militarism and the construction of a police state have been promoted and the ideological foundation for a fascist movement has been laid.”

It is impossible to understand the growth of the extreme right “without examining the role of the government, the state apparatus, the parties, the media and the ideologues in the universities that pave the way for it,” the preface states.

Right-wing extremist groups and parties have been systematically promoted, even as the danger they pose has been downplayed. The AfD, the first fascist party in the German Bundestag since the end of the Nazi regime, owes its rise largely to the Verfassungsschutz, Germany's domestic intelligence agency, which protected and advised it, and to the established parties, which paved the way for it to assume positions in parliament and adopted its anti-refugee and militaristic program.

The revival of German militarism was accompanied by the trivialization of the crimes of the Nazis. Historical lies justifying Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union were vehemently rejected in the Historians' Dispute of the 1980s, but today they dominate academic and public discourse. In Ukraine and the Baltic States, the federal government and the German army cooperate with regimes that erect monuments to Nazi collaborators.

Neo-Nazis, such as the three-member National Socialist Underground terrorist group and Stefan Ernst, the murderer of conservative politician Walter Lübcke, were able to kill without

interference, even though they were under the surveillance of the intelligence agencies. Right-wing terrorist organisations such as the wide-ranging Hannibal network remained largely untouched, even though they drew up death lists and hoarded large quantities of weapons and ammunition. While there were occasional arrests and trials, the number of accused was always kept low and the “single perpetrator” myth was maintained.

The same applies to fascist networks within the police. In both Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia, dozens of police officers participated in neo-Nazi chat groups. Hardly anyone was prosecuted. Only this week it emerged that 70 police officers are being investigated in Baden-Württemberg for exchanging swastikas and Hitler pictures in chat groups.

It is against this background that the Reichsbürger terrorist network developed. There can be little doubt that what is thus far publicly known about its members barely scratches the surface, and the Federal Public Prosecutor will do everything possible to keep it that way.

The growth of fascist forces with the support of the ruling elites is not limited to Germany. In the United States, the Republicans, one of the two major bourgeois parties, are increasingly dominated by fascist figures. A coup attempt by Donald Trump only narrowly failed in January 2021. Italy is governed by a prime minister who stands in the political tradition of the fascist dictator Mussolini. In Sweden, the former model country of social democracy, the government relies on a neo-Nazi party to remain in power.

The shift to the right by the ruling elites is an expression of the decay of bourgeois democracy. This has deep objective causes. When the class struggle in Europe intensified in 1929 and authoritarian parties seized power, Leon Trotsky wrote:

The excessively high tension of the international struggle and the class struggle results in the short circuit of the dictatorship, blowing out the fuses of democracy one after the other... What is called the crisis of parliamentarism is the political expression of the crisis in the entire system of bourgeois society.

This is once again true today. Decades of social spending cuts, in which an ever greater portion of national economic output was appropriated for the enrichment of a small minority and for brutal wars, have eroded parliamentarism and exacerbated the class struggle. The needs of the broad masses for decent incomes, secure jobs, good health care, affordable rents and peace no longer find even a distorted expression within the parliamentary framework.

Germany’s Social Democrats and the Left Party have become experts at attacking social services and imposing low wages, and the Greens have become the leading war party. For a long time they relied on the trade unions to suppress the class

struggle. But the greater the social opposition from below, the more openly the pro-capitalist parties move to the right and rely on state violence and right-wing terror to suppress it.

The fact that from time to time they are forced to arrest overzealous fascists does not change this. Nobody should give in to the illusion that the German judiciary, which beginning in 1933 was virtually united in the service of the Nazis, will stop the right-wing conspiracy. On the contrary, the measures and laws which it adopts in the name of restricting the far right are inevitably directed against the opponents of capitalism and war.

“Theory, as well as historic experience, testify that any restriction to democracy in bourgeois society is eventually directed against the proletariat, just as taxes eventually fall on the shoulders of the proletariat,” wrote Trotsky in 1938.

Because the SGP warned of the right-wing danger like no other party, it was placed on the list of “left-wing extremist” parties by the secret service. When the SGP sued the Ministry of the Interior over this, the ministry justified the move by arguing that the SGP was “fighting for a democratic, egalitarian, socialist society,” and “agitating against alleged ‘imperialism’ and ‘militarism.’”

“Thinking in class categories” and “belief in the existence of irreconcilably opposed competing classes” were declared to be unconstitutional.

The SGP, in response, went on the offensive. The party filed a constitutional complaint with the Federal Constitutional Court and launched a petition on change.org to mobilize support.

There is only one way to stop the fascist danger: The development of an independent and united movement of the international working class against poverty and social inequality, war, fascism and their cause, capitalism. The objective prerequisites for this are developing rapidly. More and more workers are no longer prepared to accept the attacks on their livelihoods.

But such a movement needs political perspective and organisation that can be provided only by revolutionary leadership. That leadership is being built by the Socialist Equality Party and its sister organizations in the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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