

German intelligence service removes Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei from extremist watchlist

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In its 2025 report, presented on 30 June, the *Verfassungsschutz*—Germany’s domestic intelligence service, formally known as the Office for the Protection of the Constitution—no longer lists the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) as a so-called “left-wing extremist” organisation. The removal shows that there was no legal basis whatsoever for the party’s earlier designation. It was a campaign against socialist perspectives that was purely politically motivated.

The *Verfassungsschutz* had first listed the SGP as “left-wing extremist” in its 2018 report. At the time, it justified this on the grounds that the SGP’s activism was directed “against the existing state and social order, invariably slandered as ‘capitalism,’ against the EU, supposed nationalism, imperialism and militarism, as well as against Social Democracy, the trade unions, and the Left Party.”

In doing so, the intelligence service expressly confirmed that the SGP pursues its goals by legal means—that it “attempts to gain public attention for its political ideas through participation in elections and through lecture events.” From the very beginning, the surveillance was therefore based exclusively on the party’s political ideas, not on any unlawful conduct.

The SGP subsequently brought legal proceedings before the Berlin Administrative Court. The *Verfassungsschutz* and federal interior ministry responded with a 56-page submission that contained no legal argumentation but rather presented a furious polemic against Marxism and every form of socialist, left-wing and progressive thought.

In its defence of the *Verfassungsschutz*, the federal government declared that even the “advocacy of a democratic, egalitarian and socialist society” was unconstitutional. Positive references to Marx, Engels and Lenin, “thinking in class categories,” “agitation against so-called ‘imperialism’ and ‘militarism’” and the rejection of the European Union were also deemed unconstitutional. Even the dissemination of Marxist literature—including the writings of David North, the chairman of the international editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*—was cited by the ministry as evidence of the SGP’s alleged extremism.

With this argumentation, the government directly invoked the tradition of Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Laws of 1878, which were directed against every organisation in which “social democratic, socialist or communist activities aimed at overthrowing the existing state or social order manifest themselves in a manner endangering public peace, in particular the harmony of the classes of the population.”

The SGP demonstrated how the Anti-Socialist Laws and *Gesinnungsstrafrecht* (criminal law based on intent or convictions, i.e. “thought-crimes”) were being revived. This represented the traditions of a “thought-police” which was taken to its extreme by the Nazis, in which defendants were convicted solely on the basis of their political convictions and not for any actual crimes committed.

The courts sided with this anti-democratic argumentation. On 18 November 2021, the Berlin Administrative Court, under Presiding Judge Wilfried Peters, dismissed the SGP’s case and ordered the party to pay the full costs of the proceedings.

In his oral reasoning for the judgment, Peters stated that the Marxist analysis that the classes stood in irreconcilable opposition to one another sounded “very unpeaceful, sounds like war.” The court declared Article 14 of the Constitution, which protects private property, to be an inviolable component of the “free democratic basic order”—although this article is not mentioned in a single word in the Federal Constitutional Protection Act on which the judgment was based. Peters is now himself the head of the Brandenburg *Verfassungsschutz*.

With their support for the *Verfassungsschutz*, the courts created a precedent that was later also used against the daily newspaper *Junge Welt* and other left-wing organisations. The Berlin Administrative Court rejected an urgent application by *Junge Welt* in 2022 not to be designated as “left-wing extremist” any longer and confirmed this decision in 2024. The SGP’s youth and student organisation, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), was also included in the *Verfassungsschutz* report—on the grounds that it shared the “ideological and strategic orientation of the SGP.” Increasing numbers of left-wing and anti-militarist organisations have come into the crosshairs of the intelligence service.

Finally, on 26 September 2024, the Supreme Court also dismissed the SGP's complaint on the narrow grounds that the decisions of the lower courts contained no "errors in the interpretation and application of the (simple statutory) provisions of the Federal Constitutional Protection Act." Germany's highest court thus sided with the criminalisation of socialist ideas, without engaging substantively with the SGP's far-reaching argumentation. The SGP's constitutional complaint had set out in detail that the classification of the party as "left-wing extremist" constituted a fundamental attack on the basic rights guaranteed in the Constitution—on freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and the right to free political activity. The court completely ignored these objections.

The SGP had received significant support for its campaign against its listing. A corresponding petition on change.org received nearly 20,000 signatures. Thousands of workers, young people and intellectuals from Germany and abroad expressed their solidarity.

"The SGP is the only party that has supported us airport workers in the fight against the WISAG corporation. An attack on the SGP is an attack on all workers who fight against exploitation, dismissals, wage theft and coronavirus," wrote Cemalettin Benli, for example, a dismissed airport ground worker. "It is absolutely unthinkable that a party that campaigns for the safety and infection protection of our children should be monitored by the *Verfassungsschutz*," declared a member of the Action Committee for Safe Education.

Various newspapers reported on the case. International supporters—including the writer Steven Brust, academics and artists—condemned the surveillance as an attack on fundamental democratic rights.

Yet the removal of the SGP from the report does not signify a retreat from the government's authoritarian offensive. A party can still be monitored by the intelligence services even if it is not listed in the report. Just recently, Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt (Christian Social Union, CSU) announced that he would comprehensively expand the powers of the *Verfassungsschutz*. According to a draft bill that became known in early July, the *Verfassungsschutz* and the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (Foreign Intelligence Agency) are in future to be permitted not only to engage in surveillance but also actively to "intervene covertly."

Specifically, the intelligence services are to be allowed to penetrate IT systems, redirect or cut off data streams, provide "false information for those involved" and delete or falsify stored information—in other words, to hack, sabotage and deploy targeted disinformation. All of this affects people who are not even accused of a criminal offence and who will never learn that the intelligence services have taken action against them, let alone be able to take legal action against this.

In the new *Verfassungsschutz* report for 2025, any

fundamental criticism of capitalism and war continues to be defamed as anti-constitutional. The report expressly warns against "Trotskyism" and declares that "left-wing extremist activities" were directed "to abolish the existing state and social order and replace it with a socialist or communist system." Anyone who opposes militarism and war is defamed as "extremist." By contrast, the real danger—the right-wing extremist terror networks within the police, the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) and the intelligence services themselves—is systematically played down.

The legal action and campaign waged by the SGP are therefore of great significance. We have exposed the line of argumentation that has been developed here and which is now being deployed against all left-wing and anti-militarist forces—against *Junge Welt*, against the IYSSE, against climate activists from "Ende Gelände" ("Game Over"), against anyone who dares to name the prevailing pro-war policies and rising social inequality by their proper names.

This attack on fundamental democratic rights is directly linked with the escalation of a pro-war policy and the fabulous enrichment of the billionaires. The militarisation of the whole of society and its total subordination to the profit interests of the rich are incompatible with democracy. That is why the state apparatus is being built up and directed against anyone who opposes capitalism and war.

The SGP will continue and intensify its struggle against the intelligence services and for democratic rights. The *Verfassungsschutz*, which is riddled with right-wing extremist networks and whose previously long-serving president is now himself classified as a right-wing extremist, must be dissolved immediately. The removal of the SGP from the *Verfassungsschutz* report is no cause for the all-clear. The struggle against the revival of the Anti-Socialist Laws and of thought-crimes continues.

Therefore, sign the petition against the surveillance of the SGP and become a member of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei!



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