

What the German Greens do not say about the Bavarian intelligence service

By Sven Heymann
9 August 2013

Early last week, the Green faction in the Bavarian state parliament announced the results of an investigation into the Bavarian intelligence agency's historical connections to the Nazi Party. The report shows that, by the end of World War II, several high-ranking Gestapo and SS officials had assumed leading positions in the Bavarian secret service and police force.

Under conditions where the report has potentially explosive consequences for contemporary politics, the Greens are seeking to conceal issues relating to the involvement of today's Bavarian state apparatus in murders perpetrated by the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground (NSU) terrorist group.

The two Green Party parliamentary members, Sepp Dürr and Susanna Tausendfreund, emphasised in their initial statements that the current mindset of the Bavarian intelligence agency—the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution (LfV)—had been brought into question because “for years investigations have been launched in the wrong direction”. In the investigation of murders of immigrants committed by the NSU, there had been repeated references to the “attitude of the authorities”.

Therefore, the Greens—supported by the other Bavarian parliamentary parties—had commissioned a study of the early days of the LfV. The aim of the study was to determine “the extent to which former Nazis were involved in the founding of the state's intelligence service and what effect this had—possibly up to the recent past—on the focus and character of the authorities”.

Although the authors of the study closely examined the development of the LfV up to 1965, everything occurring since then was kept in the dark. Moreover, the Greens are silent about the political consequences arising from the content of the study.

This is no coincidence. The inquiry shows that the Bavarian security agency was set up by the Nazis and directed primarily against the labour movement. This result undermines the Greens' claim that the secret service is now a pro-democracy organisation.

First, the historical content of the study contradicts such an assertion. The two historians, Susanne Meinel and Joachim Schröder, present strong evidence showing how widely the LfV and various police agencies in Bavaria were infiltrated by leading members of the Schutzstaffel (SS) and Gestapo immediately after the war. The period of their research extends from the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949 to 1965.

One example is the career of Leonhard Halmanseger. From 1933 to 1945, he was a member of the Gestapo and played a leading role in persecuting followers of the banned Communist Party in

Bavaria. As a result, he was delegated to the SS Reich Security Main Office in Berlin in 1938. He was a member of the SS from 1937 and was promoted to Hauptsturmführer (SS captain). He was a member of the Nazi Party from 1941.

This background initially prevented Halmanseger from official employment with the LfV. Instead, he was registered with the Bavarian border police but allowed, in practice, to work as an intelligence agent. As the study notes, this practice was quite common in the cases of former Nazis.

After a few years, Halmanseger was officially transferred to the LfV. A letter from 1953 describes what qualified him for his new position. It says he was “for decades an experienced official in the field of political intelligence gathering, who has proved to be an outstanding contributor to the establishment of the intelligence department. He may rightly be called one of the pillars of the office”.

The study also clarifies the class character of the secret service and police forces. Their aim was not to combat “enemies of the Constitution”. Rather, their targets were people who had been enemies of the Gestapo, particularly communists, in the pursuit of which they worked together with “the US intelligence agencies and many West German security authorities and courts”.

As the study reveals, it was “a matter of course” for the US Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC)—which had to approve all staffing decisions—“to exhaustively study the know-how of experienced Gestapo officials concerning their reports on communism”.

Applicants attempted to mitigate their worst excesses during the Nazi period by claiming they had always assumed posts in the Nazi apparatus reluctantly. But that did not negate the fact that a continuity of intelligence service personnel from the Third Reich into the Federal Republic was deliberately maintained. According to an internal communication, “experienced top officials” were urgently sought for the Bavarian security department in the two years before the ban on the Communist Party in 1956.

Joseph Schreieder became head of the state security office in April 1954 before moving to the LfV the following year. Having been a member of the SS from 1934 and of the Nazi Party from 1937, Schreieder had made a name for himself during the war in the Netherlands. From August 1940, he had been at the head of counterintelligence in the Netherlands under the command of the security police and the SS Security Service (SD).

His task was to sabotage the Dutch resistance organised from

England. Schreieder's work led to the arrest of more than 50 people, of whom 47 were shot in the Mauthausen concentration camp. After the war, he was acquitted in several trials in the Netherlands and deported to Germany.

When the judiciary threatened to move against Schreieder in the 1960s, the Bavarian state ministry arranged a psychiatric assessment for their LfV-tenured colleague, attesting to his mental incapacity. Obviously aware of his activities during the Third Reich, the authorities were nevertheless able to have him awarded a full pension.

As shown by these examples alone, a virtually seamless staffing and thus ideological transition from the Third Reich took place in the Bavarian LfV and in many other state institutions and public authorities of the Federal Republic. The study reveals in detail that the base of the Bavarian LfV's personnel was former Nazis.

But neither the study's authors nor the Green Party commissioners draw any conclusions about the LfV of today. The study offers neither a closing statement nor an afterword by the Green deputies. No attempt is made to begin to answer the initial question as to whether a fascist "attitude of the authorities" might still exist.

The Greens provide no explanation for how a reputed bastion of democracy could emerge within a few decades from an intelligence organisation so tainted by Nazism. And it would be impossible for them to do so.

There was never a genuine attempt to rid the post-war German intelligence forces of the numerous Nazis occupying leading positions—certainly not in Bavaria, where the Christian Social Union (CSU), which also has a Nazi past, has been continuously in power since 1946 except for a brief period in the 1950s. Although the old Nazis in the LfV have long been out of office due to old age, a large section of today's staff was employed and trained by them.

There are numerous cases after 1965 suggesting a direct link between the extreme right and the Bavarian authorities. In their preamble, Deputies Dürr and Tausendfreund mention the years of tolerating the paramilitary Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann terrorist gang and the attack on the Munich Oktoberfest in 1980. The latter resulted in the death of 13 people and injuries to more than 200 others.

More recent evidence points to the direct involvement of West German intelligence agents in the case. This has come to light in the so-called "bombers" trial in Luxembourg, which has been largely ignored by the German media.

State involvement in the National Socialist Underground terror network, especially in Bavaria, is producing politically explosive headlines. Five of the ten murders allegedly committed by the NSU were carried out in Bavaria.

The Bavarian LfV played a central role in bolstering extreme right-wing elements. In the 1990s, the LfV sent information technology expert Kai D into right-extremist circles in order to build a computer network within that milieu. Neo-Nazis communicated nationwide by means of the so-called "Thule Network" before the Internet existed.

It is noteworthy that the role of Kai D came to light only in the course of his engagement with right-wing extremists. The

Süddeutsche Zeitung reported that he received a *Deutschmarks* for his services over the years, which poses the question of whether the state deliberately groomed him to become a leading neo-Nazi.

The Greens are silent about such developments in their preface to the study. Instead, they pay tribute to the willingness of the intelligence office and other state authorities to allow them access to decades-old files. They write that "these self-critical reflections" testify to the state's "sovereignty and democratic consciousness".

This is both cynical and shameless. The so-called "sovereignty" demonstrated by the state in relation to the NSU murders and its involvement in them took the form of shredding documents, destroying vast numbers of files, and withholding evidence from the parliamentary investigation committees.

Few people today will be inconvenienced by revelations of Nazi involvement in the intelligence service prior to 1965. And some cases—perhaps the most controversial—are subject to a ban on the release of relevant files for designated periods, as the authors themselves note in their preface.

The Federal Intelligence Service, which has established its own historical commission to investigate the Nazi past, reserves a right of veto on the publication of the results. Moreover, numerous personnel records relating to Nazism were destroyed a few years before the commission was established.

According to the Green Party, the report "and the self-critical examination of the people's own behaviour and history... are defining features of a confident, vibrant and sustainable democracy". In fact, the report and its silence about the period after 1965 demonstrate the very opposite.

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