

Musicians' group calls for shutdown of the German secret service

By Dietmar Henning
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On Tuesday morning, the music action network *Lebenslaute* concluded its protest against the German secret service (the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, or BfV) with a grand closing concert before an enthusiastic audience in Cologne. The day before musicians and singers from the organisation had blocked all access roads and entrances to the concert hall.

In an almost two-hour-long concert, the musicians and choir of *Lebenslaute*, which translates as “sounds of life” in English, presented symphonic works, a Turkish lament and their own arrangements of the James Bond theme and the song “That What Friends Are For” (also known as “The Vulture Song”) from the 1976 animated Disney film, *The Jungle Book*.

Beethoven’s *Coriolanus Overture* and excerpts from the opera *Orpheus and Eurydice* by Christoph Willibald Gluck were played in turns with the choir. In the end, many of those present danced to Dmitri Shostakovich’s *Waltz No. 2*.

The conductor Ulrich Klan announced the waltz with the words, “From Shostakovich, we have learned how to make beautiful music under all-pervasive spying and surveillance.”

Lebenslaute has been holding summer protest actions against “unlawful places” for more than 30 years. This year’s summer protest action was directed against the secret service. It was held under the motto, “With suites and cantata against the state within the state—shut down the secret service!”

Also part of the protest was a group called *Keupstrasse ist überall*—or “Keupstrasse Is Everywhere,” named after the street in Cologne where a fascist nail bomb attack in 2004 wounded 22 in a predominantly Turkish neighbourhood. *Keupstrasse* staged a “file shredding performance,” portraying the actions taken by an official in Cologne, operating under the code name “Lothar Lingen,” who shredded files documenting the involvement of the secret service in the Thuringia neo-Nazi scene, after the uncovering of the fascist National Socialist Underground (NSU). They cited “Lingen’s” 2014 secret statement to the

Federal Prosecutor’s Office in which he admitted that he had deliberately shredded the files.

In a speech to the protest, Ayşe Gül from *Lebenslaute* deplored the fact that the NSU trial had left many questions unanswered about the role of the secret services in the fascists’ bloody attacks, stating that the protection of secret service sources—over 40 mostly convicted undercover informants in the orbit of the NSU—stood above the solving of at least ten murders.

Reporters from the *WSWS* and members of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) spoke with many of the musicians, singers and listeners, receiving much support for a statement they distributed, “German government places Socialist Equality Party on subversive watch-list.”

Wolfgang Rothe is a lecturer at a private school in Cologne. He said he came to the concert because “how the secret service associates itself with Nazis” is an important topic. He recalled that 15 years ago, the procedure to ban the neo-Nazi German National Party (NPD) was discontinued by the Supreme Court “because it was full of undercover informants.”

The NSU trial was not credible, Rothe said. He could not believe that the NSU trio of Mundlos, Böhnhardt and Zschäpe had carried out the murders without local support—that is, by Nazis with local knowledge.

Rothe spoke out in particular against the construction of a police state in Germany. “I am against the amalgamation of the police and secret service,” he said. “That has happened before and it called itself the Gestapo.” He added that new rules for police permitted “intimidation and almost unlimited preventative detention” on the basis of merely “abstract suspicion...[t]hat is framed extremely vaguely, so it can cover everything.”

When a reporter told Rothe that the 2017 annual Secret Service Report explicitly cites criticism of capitalism as grounds for monitoring the SGP, he responded, “This is very worrying, the government wants to make criticism of capitalism anti-constitutional and make the defence of capitalism the *raison d’être* of the state.”

Susanne, a young Lebenslaute musician, was surprised to hear the secret service thought that criticism of capitalism was evidence of left-wing extremism. "It's crass, that the service equates capitalism with democracy," she said.

Albert Müller, a student and one of Lebenslaute's spokespersons, said that the definition of left-wing extremism by the secret service assumes an ideal of a "very obedient citizen who has to abide by the rules and doesn't question anything." That is the opposite of a free state, he said.

In the view of the secret service, "everything should stay as it is," he continued. "The question of inequality, the massive unequal distribution [of wealth] and injustice remain untouched, and even criticizing them, or even initiating discussions, should be impossible. This is a blatant criminalization of any opposition."

Müller also commented on the naming of the SGP in the secret service report. "In principle, it is also such things that have led us to undertake this protest action," he said. "Here, the state is deciding who is criminalized and who is not." Insofar as the intelligence services, and in particular the secret service, define who is politically "good and acceptable" and who should be rejected, they are intervening "actively in the political process."

Hedi (Hedwig Sauer-Gühr) has been participating for years in concerts whose aim is to draw attention to what Lebenslaute refers to as "unlawful places."

"It was high time we are here and have designated the secret service as an unlawful place," Hedi said. She pointed to the fascistic history of the authority, which in 1956 provided the arguments for the prohibition of the Communist Party (KPD), and which in the 1970s destroyed the professional lives of young, left-leaning people through the so-called "radical decree" prohibiting their employment in the public sector. She has had many friends who were affected by it.

"The secret service is also unlawful because it wants to spy on people and intimidate them," Hedi said. "The secret service controls the structures by discriminating against everything that is left-wing, and, in contrast, giving free rein to the right-wing scene, including the Alternative for Germany (AfD)."

The conductor Ulrich Klan is an internationally active musician and composer. He has initiated and directed international music performances, remembrances, and joint European-Australian and German-Turkish-Azerbaijani projects. His musical repertoire ranges from classical music to new music of the 20th and 21st centuries. He has received numerous awards for musical and political commitment.

Klan was present in 1986 when the organisation was founded. "I am particularly pleased that this great movement

not only still exists, but that it is full of new young musicians," he said. "This is a movement that rejuvenates."

Klan told the WSWS that in January, members of Lebenslaute had struggled for a long time with taking up the question of the secret service in their annual summer action. The topic did not seem popular at the time. "But now, in August 2018, we see that we have started something here, that we have opened up a complex topic," he said. With the shredding of files, the secret service had "not only hindered solving a crime but hushed up crimes and possibly even committed them."

For him, the secret service is "a criminal association... It does not protect our constitution; it threatens it massively." Klan expressed anger that, even after all the revelations of its abuses, "it is receiving more and more powers, more and more money, that more and more groups are being monitored and dubbed as alleged left-wing extremists in the annual secret service report. That is, it is overbearing. It is not down to the BfV to decide what is extreme and what is not. This authority is itself extreme."

Told that in the latest annual secret service report, the SGP is named as being left-wing extremist, Klan replied that this was one more reason to work together. "This is especially scandalous, because on the other hand, it is strangely silent about the fascist and Nazi terror of the NSU and its hundreds of supporters who have not been prosecuted in the trial," he said.

From its birth, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution has been anti-communist and anti-left, Klan said. "After the war, it was built by real former Nazis, and right-wing extremists continue to set the tone today. The latest scandal that has now come out is that the head of the secret service Hans-Georg Maassen maintains close contact with right-wing extremists. So it cannot be otherwise: the secret service must be shut down."

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