

Verfassungsschutz Report 2019: German secret service downplays threat of Nazi terrorism and attacks socialist politics

By Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei
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The Verfassungsschutz Report 2019, presented by German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union) and secret service (Verfassungsschutz) President Thomas Haldenwang on July 9, made clear for all to see that the greatest danger to democratic rights stems from Germany's secret service and other state security agencies.

The year 2019, on which the report focuses, was characterised by a surge in right-wing terrorism, but hardly a word on this threat is to be found in the Verfassungsschutz report. Instead, it concentrates on denouncing as “left-wing extremists” organisations that oppose right-wing extremism, criticise capitalism and advocate socialist policies.

The new report underscores the importance of the lawsuit brought by the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP—Socialist Equality Party) against the Interior Ministry. Early last year, the SGP filed a suit rejecting its identification in the Verfassungsschutz Report 2017 as “left-wing extremist.” We warned at the time:

With its attack on the SGP, this criminal government agency wants to set a precedent for a new kind of legal prosecution of thought crimes that would provide the basis for the prosecution of anyone who criticises the current reactionary social and political situation. Striking workers would be prosecuted as well as book sellers who make available Marxist literature, or critical artists, journalists and intellectuals. ... If the right-wing conspiracy in the state apparatus is not stopped and the SGP is not defended, the dam will be broken for even more far-reaching measures.

This assessment has now been fully confirmed. Hardly a day goes by without new details emerging about right-wing terrorist networks in the Army and other state agencies. Left-wing lawyers and politicians receive death threats signed by “NSU 2.0,” a reference to the neo-Nazi terrorist group National Socialist Underground. The authors of these letters use personal information accessed from internal police computers to create an atmosphere of intimidation.

The right-wing conspiracy within the state apparatus and the government's refusal to confront it have drawn international attention and concern. Even international media outlets like the *New York Times* are now reporting on the danger of a fascist coup in Germany.

The secret service and the right-wing conspiracy within the state apparatus

A wave of right-wing terrorism during 2019 laid bare before the population the threat posed by fascism in Germany 75 years after the downfall of the Nazi dictatorship. However, the Verfassungsschutz report

barely mentions this.

This is in spite of the fact that growth of right-wing terrorism recalls the darkest days of the Weimar Republic, when paramilitary units with close ties to the Reichswehr (Army), which would later go on to become a key base of support for Hitler's reign of terror, intimidated and murdered left-wing workers' leaders and prominent politicians.

- On June 2, 2019, Kassel District President Walter Lübcke was murdered. Stephan Ernst, the prime suspect, was active in neo-Nazi circles, which were full of secret service informants. He had been under surveillance by the secret service for three decades.

- On October 9, 2019, the right-wing extremist Stefan Balliet shot two passers-by outside a synagogue in Halle. His plan to massacre 70 Jews celebrating Yom Kippur inside failed only because the building's security door withstood his assault.

- On February 19, 2020, another neo-Nazi, Tobias Rathjen, shot nine people with immigrant backgrounds in Hanau.

The murders in Kassel, Halle and Hanau were only the tip of the iceberg. In 2019, the number of anti-Semitic offences reached its highest level since records began 20 years ago. On average, between five and six anti-Semitic offences are recorded each day.

The right-wing terrorist networks have close ties to the state apparatus. In the so-called “Hannibal” network, which was established by a soldier in Germany's elite special forces (KSK) through the Uniter group and various online chat groups, hundreds of soldiers, police officers, intelligence agents, judges, military reservists and others are organised. They hoard weapons, maintain lists of political opponents and prepare for a coup on “Day X.”

But only on June 30 of this year, after more information became public about massive hoards of weapons and Nazi memorabilia, did Germany's defence minister feel compelled to partially dissolve the KSK.

The Verfassungsschutz report says nothing about this. The Lübcke murder, the first murder of a major politician by a right-wing extremist since the founding of the Federal Republic, is given just one page in a 388-page report. And this page focuses chiefly on the reaction of an obscure far-right group in Dortmund.

The “Hannibal” network also goes unmentioned. One searches in vain for key words such as “KSK,” “Northern Cross,” “Hannibal,” “Franco A.,” “NSU 2.0” and “Combat 18.”

Seehofer and Haldenwang could not avoid mentioning the threat posed by right-wing extremism as they presented the report. Seehofer even declared that the “biggest threat to security in Germany” currently comes

from right-wing extremism, racism and anti-Semitism. The aim of paying lip service to the danger was to cover up the key role of the secret service in establishing far-right networks.

Unlike in the dying days of the Weimar Republic, when the Nazis enjoyed a mass base of support among the petty-bourgeoisie, the vast majority of the population today reacts to the right-wing extremists with horror and disgust. The strengthening of the far right and neo-fascists is above all the result of a conspiracy within the state apparatus. The spearhead for this conspiracy is the grand coalition government. Its state arm includes the security agencies, above all the secret service. Its political arm is the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Any serious analysis of right-wing extremism in Germany must begin with the secret service itself. When the series of murders carried out by the National Socialist Underground came to light nine years ago, at the latest, it was clear that the neo-Nazi milieu from which the NSU terrorists emerged was built and financed by intelligence agency informants.

At least several dozen informants were active in the milieu around the NSU, including some who were in direct personal contact with the terrorists while they lived underground. Andreas Temme, an employee of the Hesse secret service, was even at the crime scene when one of the NSU's murders took place in Kassel. Later, when Walter Lübcke was assassinated, Temme was employed in his government office. The suspected assassin, Stephan Ernst, came from the same neo-Nazi circles in Kassel on which Temme was spying. None of this is mentioned in the Verfassungsschutz report.

Haldenwang's predecessor as president of the secret service, Hans-Georg Maassen, was forced to step down in 2018 after publicly defending a neo-Nazi protest in Chemnitz. Ever since, he has made public appearances as a star guest at AfD events. Haldenwang was Maassen's deputy for five years and cooperated closely with him.

The media made much of the fact that for the first time, the Verfassungsschutz report named two groups within the AfD as "suspect cases": the now formally dissolved Flügel (the Wing), and the Young Alternative, the AfD's youth movement. But this is merely aimed at covering up the true extent of the right-wing extremist conspiracy.

The extent to which the report downplays the threat of the far-right is also revealed by the chapter on the Reichsbürger ("Reich Citizens"), of which it estimates there to be 19,000. Even though the Reichsbürger oppose the state authority of the Federal Republic, are heavily armed, and advocate the redrawing of Germany's borders along the lines of the German Reich—i.e., the reconquest of large areas of Poland—the Verfassungsschutz report notes: "However, in the majority of cases in this milieu, the influence of right-wing extremist ideology appears to be very low or non-existent."

The SGP's lawsuit against the Verfassungsschutz

The secret service's attack on the SGP and other allegedly "left-wing extremist" organisations is inseparably bound up with its downplaying and promotion of far-right terrorism.

Ever since Benito Mussolini founded his fascist party in Italy in 1919, the task of such movements has always consisted in violently suppressing socialist and progressive forces. They combine historical anti-Marxism with nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism, with the goal of dividing the working class and directing social tensions against scapegoats. In Germany, this led to the Holocaust, the greatest crime in human history.

The secret service is attacking the SGP because it opposes the lurch to the right by the German ruling elite and thus gives voice to the widespread opposition to this dangerous development that exists within the population. Any opposition to social inequality, environmental damage, state repression, militarism and other injustices caused by capitalism is to be intimidated and suppressed.

In its response to the SGP's suit, the Interior Ministry openly advocated

the suppression of all socialist, progressive and left-wing thought. It declared "the advocacy of a democratic, egalitarian and socialist society," the "agitation against so-called 'imperialism' and 'militarism,'" and "thinking in class categories" and "belief in irreconcilably opposed classes" to be unconstitutional.

A ruling on the SGP's suit remains outstanding. The administrative court in Berlin responsible for the case has not yet issued a date for the hearing. However, the Interior Ministry felt compelled to respond to the suit by making some alterations to the 2019 Verfassungsschutz report. The 2017 and 2018 reports stated:

The SGP directs its programmatic agitation 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.

This passage has been removed from the latest report. In its place, the report states:

The SGP bases itself on a Marxist class analysis that is irreconcilable with the Basic Law and propagates the class struggle. The party calls for the overthrow of capitalism not only as an economic system, but also to overcome the free democratic social order.

The experts in the Interior Ministry have evidently realised that even a prejudiced court will find it difficult to declare criticism of the Left Party and the Social Democratic Party to be unconstitutional. But the condemnation of a "Marxist class analysis" underscores even more clearly what the secret service is concerned about.

It is becoming clearer with every passing day that capitalism cannot be reconciled with freedom and democracy: class tensions are sharpening, millions of people are threatened with losing their jobs and their livelihoods, a handful of banks and hedge funds decide the fate of hundreds of thousands, the rich continue to get richer, and the top 10 percent of the population owns 56 percent of all wealth.

Under these conditions, the ruling class fears that the mounting opposition among workers and young people will coincide with the socialist programme of the SGP and the International Committee of the Fourth International. This is why Marxist thought is declared unconstitutional and is to be banned.

The formulation could come directly from the programme of the AfD, with which the secret service cooperated closely under Haldenwang's predecessor, Maassen. It draws on the propaganda of the Nazis, whose ideology of a Volksgemeinschaft ("people's community") was based on the denial and violent suppression of the class struggle. And like the political and ideological justice system of the Nazis, the secret service is not punishing illegal activity, but criminalising mere thinking in class categories.

But the class struggle is not the product of the SGP's propaganda. It develops objectively as an international response to the polarisation of society. Seventy-five years after its defeat in World War II, German capitalism confronts the same problems it sought to resolve by means of dictatorship and war. It is responding once again with militarism and dictatorship to the intensification of international tensions and mounting class conflicts, which have been dramatically exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

The SGP appeals to all those wishing to defend democratic rights and

oppose the rise of the far right to protest against the attack by the secret service and support the SGP's lawsuit against the Interior Ministry.

We demand that the secret service halt its monitoring of the SGP and all other left-wing groups, and that this right-wing breeding ground for anti-democratic conspiracies be dissolved.

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