

Germany's Reichsbürger trials: Terrorist network with deep roots in the state apparatus

Justus Leicht, Peter Schwarz
25 June 2024

Three trials have begun in Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Munich against the right-wing terrorist Reichsbürger (Reich Citizens Movement) network centred around Heinrich XIII Prinz Reuss, which the federal prosecutor's office accuses of planning an attack on the Bundestag (parliament) and a violent coup. A total of 26 people have been charged so far.

Since May, the leading members of the conspiracy have been on trial in a specially constructed hall in Frankfurt's Sossenheim district.

The so-called Reichsbürger Council was supposed to form a transitional government after a successful coup. According to the indictment, Reuss, a property entrepreneur and scion of an old noble family, was the "ringleader" and chairman of the council.

The trial against the "military arm" of the group has been ongoing in Stuttgart-Stammheim since April, and other leading members have been on trial in Munich since this month.

The president of the Stuttgart Higher Regional Court, Andreas Singer, spoke in advance of one of the largest state protection proceedings in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany: five judges, two supplementary judges and 22 defence lawyers will take part in the Stuttgart trial alone. The investigation files comprise 700 Litz document folders.

The indictment makes clear that this is far from being a radical but harmless group of nutcases, but rather it is a networked organisation with a lot of money, a lot of weapons, the expertise to use them and detailed plans to commit massive, murderous terror. It has close links to the military and other state institutions. Although the ideological ideas of those involved are crude, they are widespread in right-wing extremist milieus.

The group had procured 382 firearms, 347 stabbing weapons and more than 148,000 pieces of ammunition. Its members include dozens of military officers. A group of 20 people was to enter the Reichstag (parliament building) in Berlin with armed forces and arrest the politicians there. The

police were to be placed under the control of the military and the government overthrown.

Former Bundestag member for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and judge of the Berlin district court Birgit Malsack-Winkemann is accused, among other things, of providing the military members of the group access to the Reichstag building. Malsack-Winkemann herself possessed several firearms, was a member of the "Council" and was intended to be the future "Minister of Justice" under Reuss.

At the same time, the group pursued the goal of establishing 286 "homeland defence companies" throughout Germany, which, according to the indictment, were to carry out purges after a coup. The military head of the group is said to have been 69-year-old former Bundeswehr (Army) Colonel Rüdiger von Pescatore, commander of a paratrooper battalion of Airborne Brigade 25, a predecessor of the Special Forces Command (KSK) military unit, until the mid-1990s.

Another accused member of the military arm is Maximilian Eder, 65, a former Bundeswehr colonel. He served in Kosovo, Afghanistan, at NATO headquarters in Brussels and with the KSK. The defendants Peter Wörner and Marco van Heukelum are also former KSK soldiers.

According to the public prosecutor's office, the defendants are ideologically united by three main things: most of them are either Reichsbürger followers, coronavirus deniers, QAnon conspiracy supporters—or all of the above.

Members of the Reichsbürger movement do not recognise the post-war Federal Republic of Germany and believe that the German Reich founded in 1871 continues to exist. In their view, the Federal Republic, on the other hand, is merely a limited liability company founded by the Western Allies and externally controlled—not least by "Jewish big capitalists," as Prince Reuss had fantasised. The "new order" they conceive is to be based on the German Empire of 1871, and rule is not to be democratic.

According to the latest report by the Office for the

Protection of the Constitution (as the Secret Service is called), the Reichsbürger scene comprises up to 25,000 followers, although the Secret Service absurdly claims that only 5 percent of them are right-wing extremists.

In fact, the defendants were not striving to establish a medieval fairytale kingdom, but a brutal military dictatorship whose main task was to work through lists of “enemies” who were to be liquidated.

“Treason was punishable by death—to be pronounced by Prince Reuss and executed by military courts,” reported the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* at the start of the trial. “And there were precise instructions on how the homeland defence companies were to proceed after the coup. They were to ‘clean up’. They were to ‘neutralise’ ‘counter-revolutionary forces from the left-wing and Islamic milieu’ and focus primarily on the cities. Resistance was suspected there.”

According to the indictment, the group around Prince Reuss emerged at the end of July 2021 with the aim of eliminating the state order of the Federal Republic of Germany by force of arms. At that time, there was an increase in dissident demonstrations against state-imposed coronavirus protection measures. However, it is obvious that there are numerous links to other right-wing terrorist conspiracies that have been uncovered in the past and then quickly covered up again.

This is most clearly demonstrated by the high number of members, or former members, of the KSK who are now standing trial. As we have shown in an earlier, detailed article on this topic, the “elite unit, which comprises just over 1,000 men, has a fascistic trail behind it. Its almost thirty-year history is accompanied by right-wing extremist incidents that have been repeatedly whitewashed and trivialised.”

The secretive combat unit, which is trained to track down and kill opponents, has repeatedly hit the headlines in recent years. In 2021, one of four KSK companies had to be disbanded because Hitler songs were sung at a farewell party. And the so-called “Hannibal” network, which includes commandos, elite police officers, secret service officers, judges and other civil servants from all over Germany, has its centre in the KSK. The similarities between the Hannibal and Reuss networks are obvious.

This is also evident in the three courtrooms. The defendants are celebrated by like-minded people and in many cases defended by well-known lawyers from the far-right scene who share their extremist views and represent them not only legally but politically.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reports on trial attendees wearing T-shirts with slogans such as “I believe in you” and travelling “like a caravan” from trial to trial. The far-right

coronavirus denialist party “Die Basis” (The Base) was particularly well represented.

Several defendants and lawyers are members of this party. For example, the accused Johanna Findeisen-Juskowiak is being defended by Professor Martin Schwab. Both were parliamentary candidates for “Die Basis.” Schwab, who teaches law at the University of Bielefeld, accused the court of “the greatest abuse of the administration of justice.” He claimed that the indictment had been constructed so that the government could declare a state of national defence and then remain in office beyond the 2025 Bundestag elections.

The defence bench includes far-right lawyer Olaf Klemke, who defended the accomplice and neo-Nazi German National Party (NPD) functionary Ralf Wohlleben in the trial of the fascist terrorist group National Socialist Union (NSU). Alongside him sit the QAnon-type activist Markus Haintz and the former front singer of the neo-Nazi band “Noie Werte,” Steffen Hammer. Malsack-Winkemann is being represented by the right-wing Cologne lawyer Jochen Lober.

The plan to establish a dictatorship in Germany under Prince Reuss was not successful. However, the plans for violence and murder by the accused and their circle show how dangerous and advanced the proliferation of ultra-right-wingers in the state apparatus, especially in the military, is. These are closely linked to the revival of German militarism and the associated shift towards authoritarian forms of rule.

The milieu of Reichsbürger, coronavirus deniers and other right-wing extremists that the group around Reuss draws upon is strongly reminiscent of the forces that Donald Trump mobilised to storm the Capitol on January 6, 2021. His coup almost succeeded because parts of the military and the security apparatus stood behind it and allowed the attackers to storm the Capitol—and because the Democrats were not going to call on the masses to resist.

Those in power need the right-wing extremists to suppress the growing opposition to militarism and its devastating social consequences. The trials in Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Munich—regardless of their outcome—will not stop the right-wing danger. Only an independent political offensive by the working class can do that.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)