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CIA secret prisons organized from Germany

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A report in the *New York Times* on August 13 confirms that the CIA planned and organized secret prisons from the German city of Frankfurt/Main. At least three secret prisons were administered by the CIA branch office in Frankfurt beginning in 2003.

These illegal prisons belonged to the worldwide network of "black sites" to which the CIA transferred many of its prisoners in its "war against terror." There were at least eight such secret prisons maintained by the CIA outside the US. The prisons run from Frankfurt included two that were located respectively in the Romanian capital of Bucharest and a remote part of Morocco. A third is alleged to have been in the Polish town of Kiejkut, near the Szymany airport. A fourth prison was located in Lithuania.

The secret prisons were used to extort information from prisoners using methods of torture that would not have been possible in the US. The director of the Frankfurt CIA branch office at that time, Kyle D. Foggo, told the *Times* that these measures were organized from Frankfurt because "it was too sensitive to be handled by headquarters."

In September 2006, then US president George W. Bush admitted the existence of secret prisons for the first time. These torture prisons were used to systematically subject those deemed to be terrorist suspects to sleep deprivation, waterboarding and beatings in order to obtain information or extort confessions. The CIA arrested "potential mass murderers" on the "battlegrounds of the world" and imprisoned them in secret locations where the suspects were subjected to "hard, necessary and effective methods of interrogation," as Bush claimed.

The secret prisons had to be set up outside of the US, because they contravened existing US law. The fact that the methods of torture employed by the CIA also violated international law was obviously a matter of indifference for the US government as well as for the German and European authorities.

Each of these prisons was designed to accommodate six prisoners and was constructed in identical fashion in order to confuse prisoners as to their exact location. The prisons were completely isolated and designed in such a way as to prevent life threatening injuries during interrogations. The floors were covered in skid-proof material, with plywood walls to cushion the impact when prisoners collided with the walls.

According to the *New York Times*, after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the "sleepy supply center" of the CIA in Frankfurt moved into action. The budget of this branch office was awarded an extra seven million dollars by the Bush government. At a later point this expanded budget was then trebled.

Frankfurt became the most important supply base of the US secret service in Europe. In addition, the city developed into an important logistics base for US operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, organizing supply flights for CIA deployments on virtually a daily basis.

Foggo, who was director of the Frankfurt CIA branch office, was well known for his organizational expertise. He worked for the CIA for over 20 years before pleading guilty to corruption charges in 2008 and receiving a sentence of three years in prison. Previously, in late 2004, he was appointed third-highest official of the CIA, following his deployment in Frankfurt. In the 1980s he was active in Honduras for the CIA. At the time, the US was conducting a dirty proxy war against Nicaragua, which was organized by the CIA in Honduras on behalf of the American government under president Ronald Reagan.

The role of the German government

Neither the office of the German chancellor, nor the interior ministry, the foreign office or the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND), have commented on the *New York Times* article. This silence must be taken as an admission that the German government agencies were aware of what the CIA was doing.

When questioned by the media individual police officers have declared that they knew nothing about the activities of CIA agents in Germany. This was the business of the Americans, they claimed. "Even if we got wind of anything," a high-ranking official told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, "nothing would have changed anyway."

As long ago as November 2005, the *Washington Post* and Human Rights Watch had uncovered the illegal prisons run by the CIA, and its criminal practice of kidnapping terror suspects. After these first exposures the secretary-general of the Council of Europe opened a preliminary investigation. It was led by former Swiss public prosecutor Dick Marty, president of the Commission for Human Rights of the Council of Europe. As special prosecutor Marty carried out investigations into the secret CIA prisons from 2005 to 2007.

In June 2006 Marty submitted an initial report. It stated that it could not definitively prove the existence of the secret prisons, but presented substantial evidence to indicate the use of such facilities by the US secret services. Marty continued his investigations and prepared a second report. He discovered close cooperation between European secret services and the CIA, but met with a wall of silence and denial on the part of the European governments.

The second Marty report of 2007 criticized the German and the Italian governments in particular for systematically suppressing the truth about the prisons. In Milan, leading

political agencies closed down the investigation in the same year against 26 CIA agents who had openly kidnapped the Egyptian Imam Abu Omar in Italy in February 2003 and transported him to an Egyptian torture prison.

Marty recently told the *Frankfurter Rundschau* that it was difficult to uncover the whole truth about all of the alleged terrorist suspects kidnapped during this period. In the main, European governments had "made little effort" to clarify what had taken place, he said.

Between 2005 and June 2009 a German parliamentary committee of inquiry investigated the methods used by the CIA and its collaboration with the BND. The list of the topics to be examined was long. It included, in addition to the secret prison system and secret CIA flights over Germany, the participation of BND agents in the Iraq war, the knowledge by German intelligence sources of CIA kidnappings of German terrorist suspects, and the monitoring of journalists by the BND.

In the event, the committee of inquiry served as a whitewash for the intelligence services and the German government. In its final report of June 19 the committee concluded that the Social Democratic Party-Green government at that time had no knowledge of either the secret transportation of suspects or the existence of secret prisons. The committee of inquiry expressed no interest in the fact that an inquiry set up by the European parliament had already uncovered some time before that between 2001 and 2005 CIA transport planes had landed on no less than 336 occasions at German airports. It is completely unrealistic to expect that the government and its intelligence services had no knowledge of such flights.

The final report of the Bundestag committee served above all to cover the tracks of the current German foreign minister and SPD chancellor candidate, Frank-Walter Steinmeier. During the period in office of the SPD-Green government (1998-2005) Steinmeier was head of the German chancellery and personally responsible for the secret services. At the end of 2002 it was Steinmeier who prevented the Turkish citizen Murat Kurnaz, who lived in the German city of Bremen, from entering the federal republic. Accused of being a terrorist, Kurnaz was detained in the US Guantánamo detention centre. The US authorities had offered to free Kurnaz in 2002 due to lack of evidence. Because of Steinmeier's refusal to readmit Kurnaz to Germany, however, he was forced to remain a further four years in Guantánamo.

Steinmeier denied any responsibility for Kurnaz's fate at the committee of inquiry. He was also acquitted of any responsibility in the case of Khaled el-Masri. El-Masri is a Lebanese citizen resident in Germany who was kidnapped in 2004 by the US secret service in Macedonia and transported to Afghanistan—allegedly without the knowledge of the German government.

The record shows clearly that no account of their real role will be forthcoming from the official authorities. The extent of the complicity of the German government in the criminal activities and torture methods of the CIA will only be revealed by an independent inquiry and investigation conducted by and on behalf of the working class.