

Germany: Socialist Equality Party stands in Hesse election

Partei für Soziale Gleichheit

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On November 18, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party) filed 1,100 voter signatures with the electoral registration office in the German state of Hesse. This fulfilled conditions for participating in the election for the state legislature on February 2, 2003. The state elections committee will take the final decision regarding the party's application on December 6.

The PSG slate is headed by Helmut Arens, a worker in the chemicals industry. Arens is a member of the party's executive committee and has represented the PSG in earlier elections.

At the centre of the PSG's election campaign is the construction of a new workers party based on an international socialist programme. The PSG is the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, and follows in the anti-Stalinist traditions of the Left Opposition founded by Leon Trotsky.

The Hesse election has national significance. It sharply reveals the problem confronting millions throughout Germany: the absence of a party that represents their interests and is capable of providing an answer to urgent social and political questions.

For many decades the state of Hesse was considered a stronghold of social democracy and the cradle of the Greens (where in 1985 the environmentalist party gained their first minister). Now it threatens to become the launching platform for a national offensive by the right wing.

In German politics, the state premier and Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leading candidate, Roland Koch, resembles America's George W. Bush. He is an extreme right-winger representing an aggressive mixture of calls for a strong state, chauvinism and imperialist foreign policy. If Koch wins the Hesse election, he will try to swing the entire CDU behind him and seek the

party's nomination as chancellor candidate in the 2006 general election.

Four years ago, Koch won the state election with a xenophobic campaign against granting long-term immigrants dual nationality and demonstrated his disdain for democratic norms when it became known he had financed his election campaign with slush funds. Now he wants to place the question of immigration at the centre of the campaign again, supplemented by the call for law and order (that Hesse should have the "harshest penal system in Germany"). He is also advocating compulsory labour for people on social security and supports a military strike against Iraq.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens have nothing to offer in the way of an alternative to this threat from the right. Since narrowly winning the general election in September, their poll ratings have plummeted. The stream of announcements heralding new social cuts, tax increases and budget shortfalls is gladly utilised by the opposition for their own ends.

This repulsive spectacle makes several things plain: First of all, the complete subordination of the SPD and the Greens to the interests of big business and the banks. They have taken on the task of overhauling the budget at the expense of pensioners, patients, the unemployed and public sector workers, while the large corporations and the wealthy are granted ever newer tax exemptions.

Secondly, they display boundless opportunism. The SPD and the Greens have no vision and perspective for resolving outstanding social problems. Instead, they muddle along, driven forward by big business and the right wing, while treating the mass of the population with arrogance and disdain.

Although once a workers party, the SPD has long detached itself from working people, and recruits its personnel from among well-paid lawyers, civil servants and union bureaucrats. The Greens rest on that section of

the 1960s and '70s protest generation that has climbed the social ladder. They have become a party of state—business-friendly and conservative.

In the final analysis, the right-wing trajectory of the SPD and the Greens is a result of the bankruptcy of their political programme. Social reconciliation and compromise are no longer possible in the age of globalization. The supremacy of the world market over every aspect of economic life has stripped away the basis for social reformism. Social democracy has undertaken the task of reversing the reforms of past decades.

The growing social inequality, unemployment and poverty accompanying this development are leading directly towards a social catastrophe. It is high time to draw the necessary lessons. It is not the renewal of the old parties that is necessary, but the construction of a new party providing a voice and a perspective to all those who feel repelled by official politics and are searching for a progressive way out of the dead end present society offers.

The PSG will soon publish its election manifesto, detailing its programme.

Its central axis is the fight for *social equality*. Millions of people are experiencing increasing inequality in their personal lives. Sinking incomes, precarious working conditions, uncertain old-age and health-care provisions, disintegrating schools and care facilities dominate daily life. These problems can be overcome and solved if the enormous resources of humanity—knowledge, technology and material wealth—are used rationally and in a planned way, instead of serving the accumulation of personal wealth.

The PSG calls for a comprehensive programme of public works in order to overcome unemployment, financed by tax increases for the rich. The PSG demands that the billions of euros presently flowing into defence spending at home and abroad be utilised to improve education, health and old-age provisions. The PSG intransigently advocates the defence of democratic rights, in particular those afforded immigrants and asylum-seekers.

The PSG pursues an *international strategy*. The working class can only oppose global capital by uniting internationally. Globalization has established the conditions to do this. Workers everywhere in the world face the same transnational corporations and the same attacks, and confront the same problems. Especially in the US, the gulf between rich and poor has reached staggering proportions. The permanent “war against terrorism,” with

which the Bush administration threatens the world, is also directed against the American people.

The Fourth International and its German section, the PSG, call for the unification of working people of all countries and ethnic origin. We oppose every attempt to divide the working class along national, ethnic or religious grounds.

In all probability, the Hesse election will take place under conditions of an imminent military attack on Iraq. The PSG decisively rejects such a war. Whether it occurs with or without a UN mandate, it is a war of criminal plunder. Its aim is the colonial subjugation of Iraq and control of its oil sources. It is conducted for the same big business interests that stand behind the non-stop attacks on jobs and social benefits.

Under these conditions, the defence of democratic rights, the fight to preserve a decent standard of living and opposition to war come together. They form a powerful means to unite working people on a national and international level. This must provide the basis for opposition to war, and not the SPD-Green government in Berlin, whose half-hearted denunciation of war against Iraq is based on purely tactical differences with the Bush administration.

Through a vote for the PSG on February 2, we call upon all voters in Hesse to contribute towards the construction of a new workers party and to support our election campaign practically and financially.

We will organise election meetings, information stands and other public activities in order to discuss the programme of the PSG. We appeal to our supporters to assist in this campaign. We will gladly discuss our political views at schools, youth clubs or other meetings. We are appealing for financial support to produce flyers, posters, election advertising and other materials and for donations towards our campaign fund of €10,000.

We have already experienced a welcome response while collecting signatures over the past weeks. Now the widespread political frustration and discontent with the established parties must be converted into a serious campaign to build a new workers party.



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