

Hesse state election manifesto of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit of Germany

For social equality! No to the Iraq war!

27 December 2002

The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit of Germany (PSG, Socialist Equality Party) is running its own slate in the Hesse state election to be held in February 2003. The PSG candidates offer a socialist alternative to all voters who reject the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its leading candidate, Roland Koch, and who no longer trust the Social Democratic Party (SPD) or the Green Party. The PSG slate opposes the growing attacks on social conditions and democratic rights, as well as the preparations for war against Iraq.

Why is the PSG standing in the election? In order to take forward the PSG's perspective of building of a new working class party on the basis of an international socialist programme.

The Hesse election sharply reveals the problem confronting millions of people throughout Germany and all over the world: the absence of a party that represents their interests and provides an answer to the burning social and political questions they face.

For many decades, the state of Hesse was considered a stronghold of social democracy and the cradle of the Greens. It was here that the environmentalist Green Party gained its first ministerial post, in 1985. Now Hesse is poised to become the springboard for a nationwide offensive by the right wing.

The Hesse state premier and leading CDU candidate, Roland Koch, is perhaps the closest figure in German politics to America's George W. Bush. He is an extreme right-winger, advocating a domestic program focused on the demand for a "strong state" and a foreign policy based on chauvinism and unabashed imperialism. If Koch wins the Hesse election, he will try to swing the entire CDU behind him and seek the party's nomination for chancellor in the 2006 general election.

Koch has a serious chance of achieving this goal—not because he has broad support in the population, but because none of the official parties or candidates vigorously opposes him. By introducing their own program of cuts in social spending, the SPD and the Greens have opened the way for Koch.

On a national level, under the leadership of former Hesse Premier Hans Eichel, the social democrats have taken on the task of reorganizing the budget at the expense of pensioners, the sick, the unemployed and public sector workers, while large corporations and the wealthy receive new tax exemptions. The Minister of Economics and Labour, Wolfgang Clement, aims to establish a massive pool of cheap labour, while Interior Minister Otto Schily endeavours to trump the right wing by dismantling democratic rights and launching new attacks on foreign workers. The gutting of pensions and social security benefits cannot proceed quickly enough for the Greens.

To hope that a vote for the SPD and the Greens will hinder the advance of the right wing is to indulge in illusions. What is called for is not the revival of old parties, but rather 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 present social impasse.

What does the PSG stand for? The central aim of the PSG is the achievement of genuine social equality. Only a society that drastically reduces and eventually overcomes social contradictions can be fair, democratic and progressive.

For two decades, society has moved in the opposite direction: the rich have become even richer and the poor even poorer. In Germany, the bottom fifty percent of all households possess just 4.5 percent of net assets, while the highest tenth possess 42 percent. In the US, the richest 13,000 families enjoy the same income as the 20 million poorest households combined. Worldwide, the assets of 475 billionaires equal the total income of the poorest three billion inhabitants of the planet.

Millions of people are experiencing growing inequality in their personal lives. Sinking incomes, precarious working conditions, uncertain old-age and health-care provisions, disintegrating schools and public care facilities—these are the conditions that dominate daily life. Such problems can be overcome if the enormous resources of humanity—knowledge, technology and material wealth—are used rationally and in a planned way, instead of being subordinated to the accumulation of personal wealth.

The PSG is part of a world party, the International Committee of the Fourth International. We stand for the unification of the working people of all countries and ethnic origins. We oppose every attempt to divide the working class along national, ethnic or religious grounds. Workers everywhere in the world face the same transnational corporations and the same attacks, and confront the same problems.

This is particularly clear in Europe. Everywhere—in Italy, France, Britain, Spain—strikes and protest movements are growing. We advocate that they be combined to form a broad European movement. We are for the unity of Europe, but reject the European Union because it serves the interests of the large European corporations and banks. The continent can only be harmoniously unified in the form of the United Socialist States of Europe.

The PSG rejects America's war plans against Iraq. The goal of such a war is not the destruction of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (for whose existence no proof has been forthcoming), but the seizure and control of Iraqi oil resources by US-based corporations. Control of the oil fields in the Gulf and Caspian region would not only provide for US energy supplies until far into the 21st century, but would also bring enormous strategic advantages over America's imperialist rivals in Europe and Asia.

The preparations for war against Iraq are an expression of the advanced crisis of the capitalist system. As was the case at the beginning of the last century, the great powers are seeking to divide the world among themselves by force. The US, whose liberal ideals in the 19th century helped inspire the democratic revolution in Europe, and whose financial and industrial might upheld the stability of world capitalism after the Second World War, now threatens to unleash unprecedented violence and

destruction around the world.

In the final analysis, this is a reaction by the American ruling elite to the unremitting social tensions inside the US itself. The Bush administration is relentlessly beating the drums of war because it does not have an answer to burning social and economic problems. Contrary to official claims, it is not a popular government. Its position is based on the collapse of all serious opposition on the part of the Democrats. In the US, a plutocracy prevails—the de facto rule of an aristocracy based on wealth. Republicans and Democrats represent the interests of the 13,000 families that control a huge chunk of the national income.

An enormous revolutionary potential exists in the form of the American working class. This is the basis of the opposition of the PSG to the US war drive. We do not rely on the United Nations, European diplomacy or the “SPD-Green” coalition in Berlin. The latter has already broken its election promise not to support a war against Iraq. It has granted the Bush administration full over-flight rights and the use of bases in Germany in case of war. Frankfurt airport will become the most important logistics hub for American war supplies. At the same time, it is intensifying its attacks on social and democratic rights at home and is transforming the *Bundeswehr* (Armed Forces) into an international intervention force, in order to pursue Germany’s own imperialist aims.

Resistance to war, the defence of democratic rights and the fight to preserve living standards are part of the same struggle. They form a powerful basis for welding together working people—on both a national and international level. Only a broad international movement from below can stop the war plans.

The PSG pursues its goals by democratic means. By democracy, we mean the active intervention and participation by the majority of the population in political events and decisions. Therefore, we oppose the establishment parties, which have increasingly distanced themselves from the mass of the population. They represent the interests of a small economic elite. That is the reason for the incessant attacks on fundamental democratic rights in the name of law and order. Social inequality is incompatible with democracy.

The SPD, once a working class party, has long relinquished its ties to ordinary working people. It recruits its personnel from better-off lawyers, civil servants and union bureaucrats. The Greens rely on that layer of the 1960s-1970s protest generation that has climbed the social ladder. They have become conservative, business-friendly and a party of state.

It is an illusion to expect that these parties will change course. Only a rebellion from below, the active intervention of the population in politics, can bar the way to a social catastrophe. It is towards this end that the PSG is constructing an organization and developing an orientation.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is a critical means toward this end. The organ of the International Committee of the Fourth International, it provides daily analysis of the most important political events, and develops a Marxist outlook. With editorial offices around the globe and readers in nearly all countries in the world, it provides the framework for an international working class party.

The PSG is the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. It stands in the tradition of the Left Opposition, founded by Leon Trotsky against Stalinism. It emerged in 1997 from the *Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter* (League of Socialist Workers), which was established in 1971 to preserve the continuity of the Trotskyist movement in Germany.

Contrary to the numerous “communist” groups that clung to the coattails of the bureaucracy in Moscow, East Berlin or Beijing, the BSA was not surprised by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). These events confirmed Trotsky’s analysis that Stalinism represented a counter-revolutionary cancer in the Soviet workers’ state, which would inevitably lead to the restoration of capitalism if it was not eliminated in time by the working class.

A socialist society cannot develop in isolation in a single country, under the dictatorship of an aloof bureaucracy, but only on the basis of a broad international movement of the working masses. That is the most important lesson of the ultimate and tragic end of the Soviet Union.

At the same time, the social and economic decline of Russia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union has confirmed the historical validity of the October Revolution. It has proved impossible to overcome basic social problems on a capitalist basis, whereas the 1917 October Revolution provided an initial and enormous impetus toward their solution. Never before in a time of peace has a country undergone such a dramatic social decline in so short a time as have the successor states of the Soviet Union.

In every area of society, the PSG advocates the improvement of the living conditions of the masses, the overcoming of poverty and oppression and the defence of democratic rights.

We take the view that a safe and well-paid job is a right, not a privilege. To overcome unemployment we propose a comprehensive scheme of public works. There is no shortage of tasks for such a programme. In education, the health services and the environment an acute lack of labour prevails.

For those in need, we demand a guaranteed minimum income. In Germany, one in eight children is growing up in poverty, and this figure rises to one in five in the former East Germany. This situation must be halted immediately. The Wisconsin model Koch wants to introduce leads in the opposite direction. In the American state of Wisconsin, every third child now lives in poverty.

We call for better health care and positively reject a two-tier medical system that makes reasonable care a privilege for the wealthy.

We demand that the state guarantee an old-age pension which provides the elderly with a dignified and secure retirement.

The establishment parties reject such demands by pointing to the empty public coffers. They conceal the fact that it is they who have emptied the public purse in the interests of their rich clientele.

Increasingly, well-off families and big corporate interests pay less in taxes and social security contributions, while the number of workers with regular employment, who carry the main tax burden, decreases. The number of those in full time work has fallen since 1991 by 11 percent, while those in poorly paid part-time employment has risen by 44 percent. In 1960, some 12 percent of all tax receipts were derived from wages; by 1994 this had grown to 36 percent, and continues to rise. On the other hand, thanks to the SPD-Green coalition’s tax reforms of last year, large-scale enterprises paid no corporate tax. Instead, they received a rebate.

The fulfilment of the demands raised here requires a drastic increase in fiscal contributions by those with high incomes and large property holdings.

The PSG calls unreservedly for the defence of democratic rights. In particular, we oppose all measures that seek to limit the right to demonstrate and to take strike action, and the right to free political expression. We demand the immediate dissolution of the secret services.

We are for the removal of every form of discrimination against foreigners. Asylum must be granted to refugees without restriction. Immigrants must receive full political rights.

We particularly turn to the younger generation. Do not permit an irresponsible elite to destroy the future. Do not place your hopes in the old parties that have time and again proved their political bankruptcy. Join the PSG! Read its international publication, the *World Socialist Web Site*!



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