Election statement of German SEP: For the United Socialist States of Europe

27 March 2004

The following statement was issued by the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) for the upcoming elections to the European Parliament. The PSG is putting forward a slate of candidates for the June 13 elections in Germany. The statement will also be translated into several languages, and the campaign will be taken to countries across Europe in collaboration with the Socialist Equality Party in Britain and other international supporters.

1. The aims of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit

The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG) is standing in the European elections on June 13 based on an international socialist programme.

Our election campaign is aimed at laying the foundation for a new party that represents the interests of working people, including pensioners, the unemployed and young people.

Millions are deeply worried about the political situation and are looking for a way out. The Iraq war has revealed that all the unresolved problems of the past century are breaking out once again.

Rising unemployment and mass poverty are again accompanying the dismantling of democratic rights and increasing militarism, as if the world had never experienced the events of 1914 to 1945.

The social democratic parties have discarded all their inhibitions and have become the enforcers of a tiny elite, which is ruthlessly enriching itself and plundering society. Their policies no longer differ from the right-wing bourgeois parties. Against the political bankruptcy of social democracy, we advance a fundamentally different principle. For us, the needs of the population come first and we aspire to a society that is based on the principles of social equality and justice. We defend all social achievements—pensions, health care, education, jobs and secure incomes—that are threatened by cuts. We oppose the attacks on fundamental democratic rights and reject war and militarism.

The realisation of these aims calls for a political programme that is fundamentally opposed to that of social democracy.

** These aims cannot be realised within the national framework, but require a worldwide movement against imperialism.*

The integration and interdependence of the world economy have removed the foundations that formed the framework for social democratic reformist politics. In face of the transnational corporations and international financial institutions that dominate modern economic life, the orientation of the old workers' organisations—the defence of national industry and the national labour market—prove powerless. This explains their universal rightward turn. Whereas in the past they exerted pressure on the employers and the government in order to secure concessions for the workers, now they put pressure on the workers in order to extract concessions for the employers, and in this way create more attractive conditions for capital.

The attempt of the US government to forcibly subject the world to its rule is the sharpest expression of the incompatibility of the world economy and the nation state. The global economy cannot tolerate national sovereignty. The conquest of Iraq was the first attempt to divide the world anew and establish a new world order, based upon the most brutal forms of capitalist plunder and exploitation.

Sealing off the nation and the defence of national interests are no answer to globalisation and the danger of war. They are just as reactionary as they are impracticable. They poison the climate between peoples, encourage national and ethnic tensions, and lead to trade war and war.

The PSG stands for another solution: for a worldwide movement of working people, which links the struggle against imperialism and war with the resolution of the social question. It opposes all divisions of peoples based on national, ethnic or religious considerations. To the European Union—the Europe of the banks and corporations—we counterpose the United Socialist States of Europe. Even though we are only standing candidates in Germany, our election campaign addresses itself to working people throughout Europe.

As the German section of a world party, the International Committee the Fourth International, the PSG collaborates closely with its sister organisations, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Britain and the United States. In the US, the SEP is standing its own candidates in this year's presidential elections against the Republicans and Democrats.

** The defence of social achievements and democratic rights requires a reorganisation of economic life according to socialist principles.*

Over a decade since the end of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the Soviet Union, it has become clear that the "free market" offers no answer to the urgent problems of mankind. The subordination of every aspect of social life to the laws of the market and the profit system has had devastating consequences everywhere.

In eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the introduction of capitalist conditions has resulted in a cultural and social decline unparalleled in times of peace. While the social infrastructure is disintegrating, and millions live on the verge of subsistence, a handful of oligarchs control untold wealth. In Africa and Asia, entire countries are sinking into poverty and chaos. In the leading capitalist countries, the social achievements of the past decades are exposed to non-stop attack. The gulf between rich and poor is becoming ever wider.

Social democracy has always justified its defence of capitalism by claiming it can be reformed in the interests of the working class. Nothing remains of this. Today, Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the other European social democratic parties lead the attacks on social achievements and democratic rights and no longer differ from their conservative opponents.

The PSG stands for a socialist transformation of economic life. This must be determined by the needs of society, and not the profit interests of a rich minority of capitalists. The enormous progress in modern technology has established all the conditions to solve society's fundamental problems—such as poverty, backwardness and the destruction

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of the environment. This presupposes, however, that they are used consciously in the common interest and are not left to the chaotic principle of profit maximisation. To this end, the levers of the modern economy—the banks and the large corporation—must be transformed into socialised property and placed under democratic control.

The PSG bases itself on the lessons drawn from the collapse of the Soviet Union. What failed was not the planning principle, but the attempt by a privileged bureaucracy to establish a supposedly socialist society using despotic methods, within the national framework. Workers' democracy and access to the resources of the world economy are indispensable preconditions for the construction of a socialist society. The PSG has not just advanced this position since the end of the Soviet Union, but throughout its history. It stands in the tradition of the Left Opposition, which fought since 1923 under the leadership of Leon Trotsky against the Stalinist bureaucracy and its nationalist outlook.

** The realisation of a socialist programme requires a politically conscious movement of broad sections of the working population.*

Socialism is incompatible with bureaucratic domination. Real social progress is only possible if the broad mass of the population is actively involved in the organisation of social relations and controls these democratically. By contrast, both Stalinism and social democracy represent a tradition in which the bureaucratic apparatuses suffocated the creative and historic formative power of the workers' movement. Even during times of social reforms, the social democratic parties politically incapacitated their own rank and file. Today, they consist only of autocratic apparatuses of functionaries, who feel themselves beyond any democratic accountability.

The goal of the PSG consists of overcoming this paralysing effect of social democracy on the workers' movement. We reject conceptions that are based upon pressurising the reformist parties to reform themselves or to break away allegedly progressive parts of them. Such an aim would provide them with a left-wing cover and would artificially prolong their demoralising effect.

Millions of people in Europe sense that the policies of the establishment parties have led them into a dead end, from which they see no way out. They have expressed their indignation in numerous protests, strikes and demonstrations. But only a clear political perspective can weld together this broad opposition into an effective political movement. This presupposes an understanding of the causes and driving forces of the present crisis and the political lessons of the twentieth century.

Our election campaign is aimed at launching a broad discussion concerning these questions. We appeal to all those who agree with our aims to support the election campaign of the PSG. Disseminate our election manifesto, organise meetings to discuss it with the candidates of the PSG, contribute financially to the success of the election campaign.

2. Lessons of the Iraq war

The Iraq war has abruptly brought two things to public notice: The US has been transformed from a factor of international stability into the most important factor of instability; and the European governments are completely unable to seriously oppose American imperialism.

By and large, the international institutions and norms of international law of the post-war period were the result of American initiatives. The US did not act unselfishly. The pacification of the Western world served to facilitate the expansion of American capital and the strengthening of the Western camp in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it provided for a certain stability and predictability in international relations.

With the war against Iraq, the US has made it unmistakably clear that it no longer respects these international institutions and regulations. In pursuing its own interests, it relies exclusively on its own military strength. At the same time, the US leaves no doubts that the subjugation of Iraq is only a first step. The final goal is the reorganisation of the entire region and the establishment of a new world order according to the needs of American capital. That is the essential content of the new American doctrine of preventive war.

Europe reacts by arming itself. Regardless of their attitude to the Iraq war, the European governments are agreed that they need an independent arms industry and their own military capacity, enabling them to intervene globally and conduct their own preventive wars.

The beginning of the twenty-first century thereby increasingly resembles that of the twentieth century, when two world wars devastated Europe and large parts of the world. The cause of the two world wars was the incompatibility of the national state with an economic system that encompasses the entire world. The leading Marxists of that time understood this very well. At the beginning of the First World War, Leon Trotsky wrote: "The objective sense of the war consists in destroying the present national economic centres in the name of the world economy. Imperialism does not strive to solve this task on the basis of the deliberately organised cooperation of all productive mankind, but on the basis of the exploitation of the world economy by the capitalist class of the victorious country, which seeks in this war to become a world power, not just a great power."

There are only two possibilities of resolving the contradiction between the world economy and nation state: The capitalist way—reorganising the world by force under the supremacy of the strongest imperialist power—and the socialist way—overcoming the nation state by the planned cooperation of all the peoples on a socialist basis.

In 1914, Germany, as the most dynamic economic power on the continent, tried to organise Europe anew and plunged the continent into a bloodbath. The other possibility was shown by the October Revolution in Russia. The victorious Bolsheviks immediately withdrew from the war and won enormous popularity among the workers of all Europe. But the Soviet Union was isolated and degenerated under Stalin's rule. This, and the defeats of the German workers' movement, put Germany in a position in 1939 to make a second attempt at subjugating Europe—with even more catastrophic consequences.

A new, relatively stable world order then arose upon the ruins of the Second World War, under the leadership of the victorious power, the USA. But this did not overcome the fundamental contradictions between world economy and nation state. For a long time, the Cold War with the Soviet Union cushioned the conflicts between the imperialist powers, but following the dissolution of the USSR they are breaking out again with increasing violence. The Iraq war marks a turning point in this regard.

The crisis of American capitalism

The immediate responsibility for the Iraq war is borne by the right-wing clique around President George W. Bush, but its social and economic roots extend far more deeply. The ruling elite is reacting to a fundamental crisis of American and international capitalism. A change of occupant in the White House would not fundamentally alter the direction of American policy—as demonstrated by the almost unanimous support for the war by the Democrats. Behind the war lies the attempt of American capital to overcome its economic decline through the use of military power.

The US emerged from the Cold War as the only military superpower. It presently accounts for nearly 40 percent of worldwide military expenditure. However, its relative weight in the world economy has been declining for a long time. Whereas after the Second World War the US still produced one to two thirds of the most important industrial goods, since then the European Union, Japan, Eastern Asia and China have become serious competitors. At the same time, the US is more than ever dependent on the resources of the world economy. An annual trade deficit

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of $400 billion, a foreign debt of almost $3 trillion and a budget deficit of $500 billion evidence the increasingly parasitic character of American capitalism. If the supply of fresh capital abates, a heart attack threatens.

The Bush administration pursued three goals in the Iraq war: acquiring control of the second largest oil reserves in the world; the establishment of new military bases in the Middle East, which provide crucial strategic benefits against its European and Asian rivals; and diverting attention from the increasing social and political tensions inside the US.

These tensions have reached a tremendous intensity. The gulf between rich and poor is wider in the US than in practically any other country in the world. The upper layer of society accumulated enormous wealth during the stock exchange boom of the 1990s, while at the lower end of society, poverty, hunger and homelessness grow, the public education system is collapsing and 44 million do not have any health insurance. A member of the richest 1 percent of US society today earns 75 times as much as a member of the poorest fifth. In the last 20 years, their net income rose around two-and-a-half times; that of the poorest has sunk by 7 percent.

The American working class resembles a giant in chains, which will represent the most serious opponent of US imperialism once it awakens to political life. It is becoming harder to control it with the two-party system, which is dominated—both Republicans and Democrats alike—by big money. This accounts for the constant diversion of public attention by means of foreign policy adventures, as well as the systematic suppression of democratic rights. The so-called “war against terrorism” consists of these two elements.

The European dilemma

The aggressive actions of American imperialism confront the European governments with an insoluble dilemma. If they follow the US, only the role of an American vassal remains for them. If they oppose the US, they risk dividing Europe, and, in the long term, probably catastrophic military confrontation. In both cases, the internal social and political tensions are being intensified.

This dilemma, as well as the rivalries between the European powers, tore Europe apart at the beginning of the Iraq war. Britain, which for a long time regarded its “special relationship” with Washington as a counterweight to Franco-German dominance of Europe, threw itself at the feet of the US. Spain did the same, as did Italy and the eastern European countries joining the European Union in May. The extremely right-wing and unpopular governments in these countries regard the US as a protective power—not least against their own populations.

France and Germany initially opposed the war plans, because they feared for their own interests in the Middle East. From the outset, however, this rejection was half-hearted. Thus, the German government never considered closing German air space and the American bases in the country. Hardly had Baghdad fallen, than Berlin and Paris abandoned their opposition. While millions demonstrated against the illegal war, they sanctioned the occupation of Iraq in the UN. The differences over the war are now dismissed as “differences of opinion among friends,” although new details of the extent of the criminal energy with which Washington and London prepared the war are constantly being uncovered—from the most brazen lies concerning weapons of mass destruction to spying on the UN secretary-general. Even the sending of NATO troops to Iraq is, in the meantime, considered possible.

There are several reasons for this craven capitulation. On the one hand, Berlin and Paris had to confront the fact that they were not prepared for a confrontation with Washington. The US ruthlessly utilised its political influence on the old continent in order to divide Europe and isolate the opponents of the war.

On the other hand, they did not want to identify themselves too closely with the powerful anti-war movement, which developed throughout Europe and which culminated in the largest worldwide demonstration in history on February 15-16, 2003. Even if on these demonstrations there were illusions about the policy of the German and French governments, they contained the potential to become a mass movement against the antisocial policy of the European governments. Under this pressure, Berlin and Paris preferred to settle their differences of opinion with Washington.

This experience clearly shows that the opposition to war cannot be left to the European governments, who pursue their own imperialist aims. The question of war is inseparably linked with the social question. Only a movement that acts against the roots of the war—the capitalist social order—can successfully combat the danger of war.

The present easing of tensions between Washington, Paris and Berlin does not mean that the causes of the past conflicts have been overcome. The struggle for markets, investments, raw materials and cheap labour is becoming increasingly sharper. The trade conflicts between Europe and the US are increasing. They must lead inevitably to new, more violent confrontations.

3. The European Union—a tool of the most powerful business interests

Like the US, Europe has also fundamentally changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

After the Second World War, the process of European unification was based on two preconditions: the transatlantic alliance and the Cold War. The US supported efforts to unify Western Europe economically and politically, to establish a stable bulwark in the Cold War. Through economic reconstruction and overcoming the intra-European rivalries, revolutionary upheaval, as had taken place after the First World War, was to be prevented. Although the unification process was predominantly determined by business interests, for a long time it was also linked with balancing the sharpest social and regional contrasts. Agrarian funds, regional funds and other pots of Brussels’ money served to smooth over the most glaring social distortions.

The end of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact has eliminated these conditions. Since then, the tensions with the US and within Europe have intensified. The role of the European institutions has greatly changed. The Brussels Commission has become synonymous with deregulation, liberalisation and the dismantling of workers’ rights. Instead of balancing out the social and regional contrasts, it intensifies them. The bureaucratic colossus with 40,000 staff—not subject to any democratic control, but beholden to the whisperings of numerous lobbyists—increasingly acts as an open tool of the European great powers and the most influential business interests.

The draft for a European constitution is intended to codify these conditions. It subordinates all aspects of economic and social policy to the interests of business. It links the terms “liberty, security and justice” with the obligation to protect “a domestic market with free and undistorted competition.” Article 4 specifies the free traffic of “goods, services and capital” as a “fundamental liberty.” The European Union is to enjoy “the exclusive authority” over financial policy in the euro zone and to coordinate economic, employment and social policy. This is a charter for comprehensive attacks on social security benefits, to be able to finance reductions in taxation and other economic incentives. The draft constitution also stresses the role of the military and police apparatuses “for the maintenance of law and order and the preservation of internal security.” Only afterwards does it enumerate some modest civil rights.

So far, this draft has failed to become a reality because of the contradictory interests of the member states. Above all, the governments that sided with the US in the Iraq war fear being dominated by Germany and France. On the other hand, agreement prevails concerning economic

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and social policy objectives. Despite the controversy over the constitution, the social polarisation of Europe is increasing. Hardly anything remains of the much-praised European welfare model.

The growth of social inequality

Over 20 million men and women are currently unemployed in the European Union. At the same time, this unemployment is very unevenly distributed. According to figures issued by the EU Office of Statistics, the unemployment rate varies from 3.7 percent in Luxemburg to 11.4 percent in Spain. Of those countries being admitted to full membership of the EU in May, Poland has the highest levels with 19.2 percent, or 3.3 million unemployed. Especially hard hit are youth under the age of 25. Across the EU as a whole, 15 percent of all youth are without jobs, and existing EU member Spain has the highest rate of youth unemployment at 23 percent. In Poland, youth unemployment totals 41 percent.

Growing unemployment is accompanied by growing poverty. According to the last available social report by the European Commission, in 1998 the poorest fifth in the EU received 8 percent of gross income, while the richest fifth received 36 percent. The same year, around 68 million people were affected by poverty, in particular the young and the elderly, but also young women. These figures do not include the effects of the "reforms" that have been carried out in the past six years. That period has witnessed drastic reductions in wages, regulated working hours and welfare payments. Other cuts and measures aimed at reducing taxes have meant the reduction of public investment programmes, retraining, further education, and occupational training, as well as other forms of job creation by the state.

The crisis facing pensions and health provision is the result of this deliberate policy, and not demographic factors. The officially encouraged growth of insecure jobs—low-paid and part-time work, and spurious forms of self-employment, together with declining wages and growing unemployment—has stripped away the basis for sharing the costs of social insurance. Top income earners, as well as those enjoying proceeds from property and other forms of wealth, are no longer included in the financing of the welfare state, while growing numbers of low-wage earners, the small-scale self-employed and unemployed cannot afford to contribute to the welfare system. In this way, government policies have set in motion a vicious circle, creating the conditions that then provide the excuse for further attacks on pensions and the health system.

The attack on democratic rights

Alongside the offensive against social rights, basic democratic rights are also under fire. The terror attacks of September 11, 2001, in the US also provided the European governments with the pretext for a frontal assault on basic rights. In Germany alone, more than 100 laws have been amended in connection with the passing of two rafts of anti-terror laws whipped through parliament.

While the "fight against terrorism" is cited as the official reason, most of the legal changes are directed against the population as a whole, and can be used to suppress social protest and dissident political opinions. The powers of the state—secret services, the police and the border guard—have been expanded and their financial resources increased. Through the use of profiling and by limiting data protection, a large proportion of the population is subject to routine surveillance.

The attack on democratic rights is spearheaded by the inhuman treatment of refugees and immigrants. Hundreds die every year trying to enter Europe. Detention in deportation centres without trial, internment in concentration camps, and the breaking up of families, together with the blatant abuse of political and social legal norms, are an everyday occurrence in Europe.

The consequences of expanding the EU into eastern Europe

The expansion of the EU from 15 to 25 member states, due to take place on May 1, only serves to intensify the social crisis. The gulf between rich and poor countries will grow, under conditions where no substantial measures are in place to balance out the differences—as was the case in previous expansion rounds. The very low wages in eastern Europe will be used as a lever to further drive down social standards in the richer countries.

Expansion will increase the total EU population by nearly 20 percent to 451 million. The size of the internal EU market will grow by 23 percent. In contrast, GDP in the expanded EU will rise by barely 5 percent. Taken together, the combined GNP of the accession countries corresponds to that of Holland, although the 10 countries have a population five times greater. Their per-capita GDP is less than half that of the old EU member countries.

The glossy leaflets produced by Brussels to accompany EU expansion speak of a coming upturn in economic and cultural life in eastern Europe, but the figures point to very different conclusions. Over the next two years, the EU will provide support for the new members to the tune of 20 billion euros per annum. In light of the economic and social crisis in these countries, such a sum is a drop in the ocean. This can clearly be seen by looking at the costs of German reunification. Since 1991, the German treasury has transferred 50 billion euros a year to the eastern half of the country, which has a total population of 17 million—considerably less than the 75 million in the prospective eastern European members. Despite this level of support, unemployment in eastern Germany is twice as high as in the west of the country.

At the same time, EU expansion eastwards will hit the economies of the poorer regions of western Europe, which will receive correspondingly less money from EU regional funds.

Prior to the expansion, the EU commission has already undertaken measures that will intensify social contradictions in the new member states. Through a host of criteria, conditions and stipulations it sought to ensure that a climate existed in the former eastern bloc countries that was "friendly to free market competition." This has meant massive cuts in state expenditures for social services, the privatisation of state-owned companies, and the closure of entire branches of industry and agriculture regarded as unprofitable. The consequences for broad layers of the population have been catastrophic. Foreign investment and EU subsidies have made a small prosperous centre possible in a few towns, while the rest of the country sinks ever deeper into poverty and hopelessness.

This is particularly clear in the case of Poland, which has a population of 39 million—more than the rest of the other nine accession countries together. At the end of the 1980s, large parts of the country's heavy industry (steel and docks), mining and the energy sector had been plunged into bankruptcy by a "shock therapy" programme. Industrial production declined by nearly 50 percent between 1988 and 1992. Over the same period, limits on wages for those working in state-run industries resulted in a 25 percent decline in real wages. Now the EU is pressing for privatisation to be accelerated and is demanding that the remaining unprofitable factories be closed down.

The situation is equally explosive in the countryside. Nearly 20 percent of the working population in Poland works in agriculture, which has a low level of productivity. According to EU estimates, just 100,000 of Poland's current 2 million farmers are expected to survive the process of EU expansion. After accession, Polish farmers can expect to receive just 40 percent of the subsidies currently paid to farmers in the west. This money goes mainly to richer farmers or to agricultural concerns set up on the borders, to ensure the exploitation of Polish land using industrial methods. Moreover, it is expected that cheap western food products will flood Eastern markets as soon as trade barriers are lifted—meaning there is nothing to prevent a mass liquidation of Polish farming interests.

German business in particular has considerable interests bound up with eastward expansion. It already uses the east as a market for its goods and as a source of well-trained but cheap labour. The share of German exports to the new member states in eastern Europe is nearly equivalent to that of

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the US (i.e., around 10 percent). Total German trade with these countries amounts to 40 percent of the EU total. German companies have invested massively in eastern Europe. Fully 350,000 workers in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary are employed by German companies. One German concern—Siemens—has 95 subsidiary companies with 25,000 employees. In 1991, Volkswagen took over the Czech car producer Skoda.

Total labour costs for a skilled worker in the accession countries are just one eighth of the equivalent figure for a worker in Germany. But there will be no rapid levelling up of wages. This is not only due to high levels of unemployment, but also because of a regulation stipulating that the free movement of persons will only come into effect seven years after membership.

4. The United Socialist States of Europe

The PSG decisively rejects the European Union, its institutions, and planned constitution, as well as the process of eastward expansion under the control of the EU. Our rejection, however, has nothing to do with the position that seeks to seal off Europe to the east or rejects the admission of countries like Turkey because it would be "too expensive."

The overcoming of European borders and the joint application of the enormous technical and cultural resources and material riches of the continent would create the preconditions for overcoming poverty and backwardness in a short period, enabling a rise in living standards throughout Europe. This remains impossible, however, as long as the process of unification is determined by the profit interests of big business. In its present form, unification guarantees complete freedom of movement for capital, under conditions where the broad mass of the European population is divided by huge differences in wages and living standards, immigrants are subject to discrimination, and democratic rights are being done away with.

A progressive unification of Europe is only possible in the form of the United Socialist States of Europe. This presupposes the political unification of the European working class. Working people in eastern Europe and Turkey are the most important allies in the struggle against the big business interests that determine the course of the EU.

The PSG rejects every form of nationalism and regionalism. The demand for national sovereignty or regional autonomy—whether for Scotland, Catalonia or Padua—is no answer to the diktats from Brussels. Such demands would only mean substituting many small cages for one central prison. They divide people along national, ethnic and religious lines, and so facilitate their suppression. Such demands lead inevitably to a Balkanisation of the continent, evoking all of the terrible developments that emerged after the division of Yugoslavia—murderous nationalism, the expulsion of ethnic minorities and economic decline. The PSG rejects all measures aimed at establishing new barriers and borders, whether of an economic or political nature.

To achieve the socialist reorganisation of Europe we propose the following program:

** For social equality and justice*

The right to a job, pensions, health care and education are basic social rights. They must take priority over the interests of the big companies. The problem of unemployment calls for a massive programme of public works to create millions of new jobs in socially vital areas such as education, care for the elderly, culture and the development of infrastructure—in particular in eastern Europe. Every citizen must be guaranteed a state pension allowing a carefree existence in old age, comprehensive health care and treatment, together with free education up to and including university.

According to the standard argument, the public purse is empty and there is no money for such projects. In fact, the means are available—they are, however, distributed in a completely unfair manner. An extensive social programme demands the rational reorganisation of the economy to serve public interests and not the profit interests of the most powerful groups of capitalists. Major companies and financial institutions must be nationalised and subject to democratic control. Small and medium-sized concerns, fighting for their survival, must be guaranteed access to cheap credit, enabling the regular payment of their workforce. High incomes, income from capital and property must be subjected to high levels of taxation, in order to finance social provisions.

** For democracy and the rights of immigrants*

The defence of democratic rights and the advocacy of political equality for all is a central component of the struggle for a socialist Europe. The restrictions placed upon democratic rights in the name of the "fight against terrorism" must be rejected and measures taken to pare back the omnipotence of the security and intelligence service.

The struggle for democratic rights is not limited merely to repulsing attacks. All talk of genuine democracy is meaningless as long as social wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, while the vast majority are excluded from any say in their work, the press and media are monopolised by big business, and culture and education remain the privilege of a tiny elite. Cuts in the sphere of culture and artistic training are enormously destructive to society. There is an undeniable link between the glorification of militarism, brutality, and egoism and the rejection of the artistic and cultural heritage of the past.

The European working class will be unable to defend its own democratic rights unless it takes responsibility for the millions of refugees and immigrants who live on the continent. Behind the witch-hunting of immigrants is the attempt to split the working class along ethnic, religious and racial lines, and thereby hold back and suppress the class as a whole. Refugees and immigrants represent a significant part of the working class and will play an important role in the struggles to come.

** Against war and militarism*

Working people must provide their own independent answer to the danger posed by American imperialism. They cannot afford to allow themselves to be deceived by the recent conciliatory tones from European governments towards Washington. The explosion of US imperialism threatens to plunge all of mankind into a catastrophe. It is the biggest single threat to peace.

We are in favour of the immediate dissolution of NATO and the closure of all American bases on European territory.

While European governments are striving to make peace with Washington, they are also intensively pursuing their own imperialist projects. To this end, they are constructing a European strike force and an independent European armaments industry. We reject these developments and call for the immediate withdrawal of European troops from the Balkans, Afghanistan and Africa.

The struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe and resistance to imperialism and war are intrinsically bound up with one another, and are the responsibility of the working class. A socialist Europe would be a vital counterweight to American imperialism. It would support the struggle by oppressed peoples across the globe against imperialism and oppression and would thereby undermine the influence of retrogressive ideologies such as Islamism. In particular, it would be a pole of attraction for the American working class and would support the latter in its efforts to overcome the two-party straitjacket of US politics and develop as an independent force against US imperialism.

5. The bankruptcy of the old workers' organisations

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Social democracy and the reformist trade union bureaucracy have reacted to the international crisis of capitalism by shifting entirely into the camp of the bourgeoisie. Whereas in the post-war period, social democracy saw its task as stifling broad anti-capitalist moods amongst workers, reconciling them to the market by means of reforms, now they have switched to defending capitalism at the expense of past reforms.

In 1998, social democratic governments ruled in 11 of 15 EU countries. Their election victories were largely the result of disillusionment with the policies of their conservative predecessors. However, the policies of these social democratic governments only differed from those of their forerunners in the sense that they were frequently even more right wing. Tony Blair's "New Labour" adopted the programme of Margaret Thatcher. And with its "Agenda 2010," the SPD under Gerhard Schröder has undertaken the most comprehensive attack on the German welfare state since forms of social insurance were first introduced by Chancellor Bismarck in the nineteenth century.

The SPD is supported in its course by the Green Party. The rush to the right by the Greens is even more breathtaking than that of the SPD. Emerging from the remnants of the 1968 protest movement, they originally called for the defence of the environment, rank-and-file democracy, pacifism and—to a limited degree—social justice. However, they rejected any identification with the interests of the working class. Today, they stand for that narrow stratum of the middle class that has been able to climb the social ladder. They respond with increasing hostility to demands from below for social improvements. For them, the "reform" of the welfare state cannot proceed quickly enough. The pacifists of yesteryear now favour a professional army and worldwide intervention by German troops.

The policies of social democracy and the Greens while in government have opened the way for the right wing to come back to power. In Italy, Silvio Berlusconi was forced to resign following mass demonstrations against cuts in pensions in 1994. Now he is back in office following widespread disillusionment with five years of a centre-left government. In France, the government of Lionel Jospin did the same job for Jacques Chirac.

The forces of the extreme right that are either directly or indirectly involved in government in many European countries—neo-fascists and the Northern League in Italy, Haider's Freedom Party in Austria, the Danish Peoples Party in Denmark—possess no mass basis and have only come to power thanks to the support of rich cliques in the ruling elite with access to the media. In this respect, a man such as Berlusconi, the billionaire and media tsar with underworld connections, is the rule, not the exception. These right-wing elements can only hang on to power because they face no challenge from the left.

In the face of these experiences, anyone who maintains that the old, bankrupt workers' organisations are a "lesser evil," which can be forced to respond to workers' interests, or from whose ranks progressive layers will emerge under pressure from the streets, is doing the working class a grave disservice. Numerous experiences over the past years have shown that such notions are illusory and only serve to chain workers to the bourgeois order. The task is not to assemble so-called "left-wing" forces from inside or on the periphery of such organisations, but rather to give the working class, which has long since been politically disenfranchised, an independent role, a political voice. This calls for the building of a new party that will enable the working class to intervene in political events as an independent force.

6. The PSG and the radical "left"

This orientation fundamentally separates the PSG from all other left-wing organisations. Although many call themselves socialist, they limit their aims to putting pressure on the bureaucratic apparatus of the trade unions and reformist parties.

The PSG regards the complete break with these organisations as the basic precondition for the development of a broad socialist movement.

The radical "left" organisations tend to glorify trade union struggles, without undertaking a criticism of the leadership's policies. They encourage the illusion that it is possible to revive the reformist-type policies carried out in the 1960s and 1970s, and are jubilant when any social democratic politician expresses a slightly different point of view. Such groupings are an obstacle on the path towards a new socialist perspective—a fact that has been confirmed by a series of recent experiences.

For five years, Rifondazione Comunista (Refounded Communists, PRC) in Italy sought to bridge the gap between the militant mood of the working class and the centre-left government in power. While mobilising outside parliament and verbally criticising the government in harsh terms, the PRC ensured that the government had the necessary majority to impose a drastic austerity programme and that Italy met the Maastricht criteria to join the European single currency.

However, this did not prevent many organisations from joining ranks with the PRC, presenting the organisation as a role model for the left in Europe. In the meantime, the PRC has made clear that it will join the centre-left coalition in the next general election and would be ready to take up ministerial office in the event of victory.

In Germany, many left-wing organisations have adopted the same attitude towards the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). Despite the Stalinist roots of this party, which used to govern East Germany, they describe it as the "party that has developed a policy for all those who are oppressed, exploited and underprivileged under capitalism." The PDS has since done its very best to dispel this view—together with the SPD in city hall in Berlin, it has imposed a programme of radical cuts.

In Britain, a number of left-wing organisations have united to establish a new grouping called "Respect," centred on the figure of long-time Labour MP George Galloway. Galloway was expelled from the Labour Party because, based on his connections to several Arab regimes, he opposed the war against Iraq. He is a notorious opportunist, who personally rejects the term "socialist" to describe his own politics.

In France, two organisations that incorrectly call themselves Trotskyists—Lutte Ouvrière (LO) and Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR)—have a similar position. Following widespread disillusionment with the French Socialist and Communist Parties, they have recently been able to win considerable electoral support. They won a combined vote of 10 percent in the first round of voting in the 2002 presidential elections but were not prepared to take responsibility for an independent perspective. In the course of the second round, at a point when millions took to the streets to demonstrate against the neofascist Le Pen, the LCR called for a vote for the Gaullist Chirac, while LO remained entirely passive. Both organisations rejected the call for an election boycott—which would have denied the election any legitimacy and prepared the working class for future struggles.

The PSG bases itself on a long Marxist tradition that has at its centre the political and cultural emancipation of the working class. This tradition includes the early years of social democracy, which educated generations in the spirit of Marx and Engels, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Karl Liebknecht, who opposed the degeneration of social democracy and its capitulation to the bourgeoisie at the beginning of the First World War, as well as the Left Opposition led by Leon Trotsky, which fought the crimes of Stalin and in 1938 established the basis for the revival of the international workers movement with the foundation of the Fourth International.

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As long as social democracy and the Stalinist Communist Parties dominated the worker's movement, it was possible to isolate this Marxist tradition. The political bankruptcy of these organisations, however, opens up a new historical epoch in which the Fourth International will find a growing audience. With the *World Socialist Web Site*, it possesses an instrument that has established a broad readership all over the world and is increasingly recognised as the authentic voice of Marxism.

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