

Berlin: Successful rally concludes PSG European election campaign

Our reporter
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On Saturday June 5 the German Social Equality Party (PSG) held the main meeting in its European election campaign in the German capital of Berlin. Over 100 participants attended, with many traveling from some of the main cities in both the former west and east of the country. The contributions and discussion centered on the implications of the war in Iraq, the crisis of American imperialism and its consequences for European political developments. Three speakers addressed the meeting.

Peter Daniels, a member of the US *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board, brought fraternal greetings from the Socialist Equality Party in the US and explained the ambitious presidential election campaign being waged by the SEP throughout the country.

He remarked that under present conditions the SEP did not expect to receive a large vote in the elections and the party was not intervening in the belief that bourgeois elections will accomplish fundamental social change. The aim of the campaign, he explained, was to educate broad sections of working people and demonstrate that a democratic and socialist alternative does exist, to show that there is a way out of the present impasse that threatens all of humanity with catastrophic war, poverty and dictatorship. He explained that the SEP had met with a powerful response with its call for a new working class party.

He continued: "Our work takes place under explosive conditions. The invasion of Iraq launched about 15 months ago has led to a growing crisis and impasse for American imperialism—an impasse that was predicted by our movement. Following the exposure of the lies about weapons of mass destruction and the alleged involvement of the Saddam Hussein regime with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the whole world has been able, through the means of digital photography, to view documentary evidence of what took place at the Abu Ghraib prison and the criminal behavior of US imperialist occupation forces.

"There is no mystery about these developments. To most of the people at this meeting I am sure they came as no surprise, but that is not to minimize their importance, nor the significance of the way they came to the attention of the entire world. We are witnessing, not only what Trotsky referred to 70 years ago as the 'coming eruption of American imperialism,' but also the deepening contradictions for the American government as it tries to extricate itself from its crisis.

"US imperialism was able to achieve a few initial military victories in Iraq as it also did, for example, in Vietnam. But it cannot reconcile the working masses to colonial plunder and repression. We are dealing with the most fundamental contradictions of the existing social order. At a certain stage of its crisis, the world capitalist system commences to plunge humanity into the horrors of war and dictatorship. In order to defend its outmoded system of social relations, it must destroy huge sections of unprofitable productive forces—and this includes above all the working class itself.

"This is the true meaning of the barbarism on display at Abu Ghraib prison and the accompanying inculcation of the idea that the Iraqi people are less than human. The preparations for the same treatment to be meted

out to the working class at home are far advanced. As we have pointed out, the identical abuses seen in the Iraqi photos are already routine in much of the massive US prison system.

"All of the crimes we are witnessing in Iraq are a sign of weakness, not of strength. The policies of the crisis-ridden White House administration has led to a worldwide radicalization that is being fomented by the unlikely figure of George Bush himself. A limited but nonetheless significant expression of this can be seen in the recent elections in such far flung locations as South Korea, Spain and to some extent in India. Of course none of the fundamental problems confronting working people have been settled or hardly touched by these elections, but it is noteworthy that those bourgeois political forces which raised any sort of opposition to the Iraq war have been swept into office or have retained office by very wide margins. The broad international sentiment against the war is not an expression of "anti Americanism," but rather a recognition of the fact that the Bush Administration is the greatest enemy of humanity.

"This recognition is healthy, necessary and entirely to be welcomed. But it is not sufficient for such opposition to limit itself to tossing Bush out of the White House. The limitations of such an outlook are clear when one takes a sober look at the Democratic alternative to Bush. As we have made clear Kerry himself voted in favour of the war and now calls for the strengthening of US forces in Iraq to stave off a devastating military defeat. As popular opposition to the war grows inside Iraq itself and across the world, we are witnessing a closing of the ranks between the Republicans and Democrats.

"When we reject the siren call to line up behind Kerry to defeat Bush, it is not, however, because we minimize the significance of this most reactionary government in US history. It is not because we simply say that both camps are the same and lazily refuse to analyze what is actually taking place in terms of the deepening political scandal.

"On the contrary, our investigation of these developments as Trotskyists demonstrates that what is posed is not taking sides with one or another faction of this ruling elite, but utilizing its crisis and confusion, its inability to rule in the old way, to advance a solution—the socialist solution. We are confident that both in the US and in other parts of the world, the work of our party and of the *World Socialist Web Site* will lead to great advances in the preparation of the subjective factor, the construction of a leadership for the working class which bases itself not on dreams or wishes but on objective reality itself in the coming period of the struggle for socialism."

Chris Marsden, national secretary of the British Social Equality Party, brought the warmest welcome from the SEP to the meeting, and addressed the repercussions of the US political crisis for European and British ruling circles.

In his remarks Marsden pointed to the political crisis affecting many European governments and declared that the future of those regimes most closely associated with the war against Iraq were highly precarious: "Aznar's regime in Spain has already gone and Italy's Silvio Berlusconi

and Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair's political future hangs by a thread.

"The mass antiwar sentiment that exploded into demonstrations of more than 11 million people must be seen as only the most developed expression to date of a far broader disaffection with the old political and social order. Opposition to war also tapped in to rising discontent with the anti-working class social and economic policies pursued not only by Blair, Aznar, Berlusconi and Bush, but by the war's critics such as Germany's Gerhard Schröder and French President Jacques Chirac.

"For a short period, the scoundrels in Paris and Berlin were able to accrue a modicum of popular sympathy for their stand against the US-British led war on Iraq. But that has not lasted very long—given their readiness to line up behind Washington in the vital task of preventing a disaster in Iraq that would threaten the survival of them all and their own pro-big business agenda and destruction of welfare reforms."

Marsden emphasized that many of the political processes now unfolding in Europe had taken their most advanced expression in the UK. He pointed out that no individual, with the possible exception of Bush himself, was more compromised and hated as a result of the Iraq war than Blair. He went on to explain:

"Blair survives because his personal fate expresses a crisis of rule for British imperialism. We explained this carefully in the statement we produced on Blair's recent call for a referendum on whether to endorse the proposed constitution for the European Union.

"We stressed that this growing conflict within the ruling class over European integration was driven forward by the escalating rivalries between the US and the major European powers.

"During the entire postwar era, British imperialism has sought to maintain a world role for itself based on an acceptance of US hegemony and its readiness to act as Washington's most trusted ally. This enabled Britain to face off the challenge from its major European rivals, Germany and France, and to carve a greater niche for itself both in Europe and throughout the world.

"Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US bourgeoisie set out to reorganize the world under its undisputed hegemony and was no longer prepared to continue many of the compromises with the European powers that characterized the Cold War era. Blair saw his central task as one of accommodating to this explosion of US aggression—even if this meant alienating his European partners. But he also calculated that his position could be strengthened by orienting towards the EU, while acting as a pro-American power broker in Europe and as an alternative to the German-French axis which has dominated Europe since the end of the Second World War.

"For some time this course served him well given that the last thing that Berlin and Paris could contemplate was an open breach with Washington. Blair was able to support those aspects of the EU deemed conducive to US and British interests—in particular any measures to open its markets up to global investors and to eliminate welfare provisions and labour market regulations. At the same time he could also oppose those measures that strengthened Europe as a political entity under German and French hegemony making Europe better able to challenge the US.

"In short Blair's vision for Europe echoes the efforts of Washington to curtail the power of France and Germany, and to assert America's role as a European power by playing off 'new Europe' against 'old Europe'. The danger for Blair today is that the mounting tensions between America and Europe threaten to blow his balancing act apart.

"On every front the US is responding to its crisis with a reckless offensive, hence the demand from within sections of the US ruling elite that Britain steps up its efforts to sabotage the EU constitution, undermine the political ambitions of France and Germany and ensure America's hegemony over Europe remains unchallenged.

"Blair must dance to this tune because he is the political creature of a

financial oligarchy. This super-rich layer views trade with Europe as secondary to its ability to exploit the resources of the entire world and looks to US military might as the guarantor of its right to plunder the globe."

Marsden noted that both France and Germany were in the process of ditching any opposition to the Iraq occupation and seeking their own accommodation with the Bush administration. He remarked that although substantial divisions had emerged between Blair and other European leaders, "This does not mean that Blair will be forced to split with Europe, rather he will continue to act at Washington's behest. He has the advantage that the prostration before Washington made recently by Germany and France is only slightly less nauseating than his own."

The final speaker at the meeting was Ulrich Rippert, leading candidate of the German PSG in the European election campaign. He also stressed the significance of the current crisis of the American ruling elite for political relations in Europe.

"Last year millions all over the world, and including hundreds of thousands in all the major European cities, took part in rallies against the Iraq war. Despite the scale of the protests they were not able to stop the war or the ruthless prosecution of its military policies by the Bush government. As a result many opponents of the war drew pessimistic conclusions, concluding that American imperialism was all-powerful and could do what it wanted. It was above all the work and analysis carried out by our party and, in particular by our comrades in America, that has made clear that the Bush administration is not operating from a position of strength. The *World Socialist Web Site* demonstrated that the US war against Iraq was not just about oil, it was not just about geo-strategic advantage in the Middle East, but was also an attempt by layers of the US ruling class to divert attention from the enormous social economic and political problems raging inside America itself."

Rippert drew attention to the shift of opinion in sections of the European bourgeoisie regarding the Iraq war. He quoted a German journalist who wrote recently on the meeting between European leaders and Bush on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of D-Day.

Wolfgang Koydl wrote: "Above all political leaders in Europe and America are striving to establish a civil, polite and accommodating tone with one another. Bush is the one who has more to swallow than Messrs Schröder, Chirac or Putin: because, despite any attempts to put it in a good light, the fact is that Bush's strategy in Iraq lies in tatters and he is now forced to ask for help in patching things up from precisely those Europeans who warned him in the first place from taken up such a fragile enterprise."

Koydl continued: "Nevertheless practical politics and a sober look at circumstances leave no other option than working together with the US as closely as possible. Emotions forced a wedge between the partners, now it is common interests which are wielding them together."

Rippert emphasized that the common interests of the European and US ruling elites was nothing less than the maintenance of bourgeois rule in the Middle East and throughout the world—a domination which has been jeopardized by the recklessness of the US administration in Iraq.

Rippert concluded his remarks by explaining the type of leadership the SEP was seeking to build and contrasted it with recent initiatives to form a new political formation in Germany. "There are those in Germany who have reacted to the crisis of social democracy and its loss of members by cautiously raising the possibility of forming a new political party. They make it clear, however, that their conception of a party is one which rejects principles. It is not about principles, they say literally in their material. It is not about 'reform or revolution'. Instead they want the 'broadest possible movement' which excludes no-one and refrains from developing 'radical policies directed against others'.

"In a country which has seen a number of attempts to construct alternative parties—the USPD after the First World War, the SAP in the

thirties, in which Willy Brandt played such a treacherous role, or more recently the Greens—these advocates of a new party maintain there is nothing to learn from the experiences of the twentieth century. Their aim is to create as many problems and as much confusion as possible for all those seeking to break with the SPD and social democracy.

“Our conception of an alternative party is very different. We are campaigning not for the unity of the so-called left, but for the unity of the working class which can only come about when workers have drawn a balance-sheet of the lessons of the twentieth century and are able to develop their own revolutionary perspective. Establishing clarity on these issues has been a priority for the intervention of our party in the European elections.”

A number of those attending declared their interest in learning more about the PSG and working together with the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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