

Partei für Soziale Gleichheit certified to take part in German federal elections

The Editorial Board
17 August 2005

At its meeting in Berlin on August 12, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) decided which parties can participate in elections for the German parliament (Bundestag) scheduled for September 18. The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party) was officially accepted to participate in the election with the unanimous approval of the commission, meeting under the chairmanship of Johann Hahlen.

The PSG applied for candidacy in the elections immediately after Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Social Democratic Party-SPD) made a call on May 22 for early federal elections. Schröder made the call the same evening that the SPD suffered a disastrous defeat in elections held in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Because of its prompt application, the PSG was the fifth party to be dealt with at the FEC meeting. After Johann Hahlen explained that the PSG had fulfilled all of the relevant requirements for candidacy and briefly recounted the party's electoral activities in past years, Bundestag deputy Cornelia Sonntag-Wolgast, representing the SPD on the commission, asked to speak. She criticized the PSG for its small membership and queried whether a party which had been active for several decades and had less than five hundred members could be recognized as a party under German election law.

Thereupon Ulrich Rippert, who represented the PSG at the commission hearing, was asked to respond. Rippert explained that one could not measure the significance of a party merely on the basis of its numeric strength, otherwise those parties which have lost considerable numbers of members in the recent past would have to be downgraded in terms of political status.

He recalled that the PSG had participated in eight different elections over the past fifteen years and won

25,000 votes in the European election held last year. "In addition," he said, "we publish a daily Internet newspaper, the *World Socialist Web Site*, which appears in more than ten languages and has a rapidly growing readership."

Rippert stressed: "There cannot be the slightest doubt regarding the participation of the PSG in public political debate and that the PSG fulfills all the conditions laid down by German electoral law."

The chairman of the commission then declared he was satisfied with this statement and recommended acceptance of the PSG for participation in the election. His recommendation was unanimously approved by all other commission members.

At the beginning of the meeting, it was made known that eight parties had already been certified on the basis of their current activities in the Bundestag or state parliaments, and were therefore not subject to approval by the Federal Election Commission. These eight parties include Germany's main political groupings with Bundestag representation—the SPD, the CDU (Christian Democratic Union), the CSU (Christian Social Union), the Greens, the FDP (Free Democratic Party) and the newly formed Left Party. The remaining two groupings are extreme right parties which have representation in some German state parliaments—the German People's Union (DVU) and the National Democratic Party (NPD).

Of the other 58 parties and political groupings which applied for candidacy, three withdrew their requests, 26 were certified and 29 were rejected. Amongst those rejected were several right-wing groups, including the Conservative German People's Party, the German Reich Party (PDR) and the Catholic German Center Party.

A prolonged discussion was held by the commission

over the application for candidacy by the so-called Party of Non-Voters, which has some support in the city of Cologne and the region of North Rhine-Westphalia. Dr. Werner Peters, who represented the group, stressed that he was not calling for abstention in the election, but “quite the opposite, sought to mobilise voters against the cartel of all the established parties.” Hahlen criticized the fact that the statutes of the organization acknowledged its concentration in North Rhine-Westphalia, but nevertheless the group had failed to put up candidates in this year’s election in the state.

Peters responded by arguing that his organization had deliberately declined to participate in North Rhine-Westphalia in order to concentrate its efforts on the Bundestag elections due in 2006. His organization “was completely surprised by the undemocratic decision of the chancellor to call for early elections” this autumn. Peters’ protestation that his party was seeking to expand its political activities by participating in the federal elections was flatly rebuffed by Hahlen, and the commission rejected the application of Peters’ organisation.

At the last elections to the Bundestag three years ago a similar number of parties and groupings was rejected. Of a total of 47 applicants, 23 were recognized and 24 turned down. Four years previously (1998), just 34 applications were approved out of 68 requests.

The PSG is the only party to be registered for the election that advances an international socialist program. Virtually all of Germany’s nominally left organizations have dissolved themselves into the recently founded Left Party led by Oskar Lafontaine (formerly of the SPD) and Gregor Gysi of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS—the successor party to the East German Stalinist Socialist Unity Party). The Maoist grouping MLPD is standing its own candidates in the September election, its offer to participate in the Left Party having been rejected.

Another German Stalinist organization, the DKP (German Communist Party), which stood its own candidates in European elections last year, has been beset by conflicts over whether or not it should participate in the Left Party. At the FEC meeting, the authorized representative of the DKP executive committee withdrew the organization’s candidacy for the autumn election.

The PSG is opposed to the left regrouping led by Lafontaine and Gysi. In its election statement and its campaign meetings, the PSG has warned that while the elections will be used to introduce a new round social and political attacks, the role of Lafontaine and Gysi is to lull the working class with the illusion that it is possible to return to the reformist type politics which characterized the 1970s by pressuring the main parties by means of a parliamentary opposition.

The PSG election manifesto states: “In this election, the working class confronts not only the bankruptcy of the Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green Party coalition government, but a historical crisis of the capitalist system.

“The globalization of production and the growing conflict between the national state system and world economy have brought to a head all of the unresolved problems and contradictions of the past century. The war in Iraq and that country’s brutal military occupation are only the beginning. The American government is seeking to redivide the world in the interests of US imperialism and establish a global order based on the most flagrant forms of capitalist plunder and exploitation.”

The PSG is seeking to develop a broad political mass movement throughout Europe and worldwide opposing the capitalist system on the basis of a socialist perspective.

The PSG has candidates standing in four states: Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia, Hessen and Saxony, and has collected nearly 10,000 signatures to obtain ballot status. German electoral law requires that parties wishing to put up candidates must collect at least 2,000 valid signatures per state. In the course of its campaign, the party has received broad sympathy for its policies.



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