

Increased media coverage of PSG candidates in German federal elections

Our reporter
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Since the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party, PSG) was officially accepted by the Federal Electoral Commission to stand in Germany's September 18 federal elections, together with its candidate lists for the states of Hesse, North Rhine Westphalia, Saxony and Berlin, the party has received scores of requests for interviews and invitations from various newspapers and television and radio stations to discuss its socialist policies.

The PSG is running eight candidates, whose names will appear on the ballot in four of Germany's most populous states. The candidates are:

In Berlin: Ulrich Rippert, 54, chairman of the PSG and member of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, and Fabian Reymann, 25, a software developer in Berlin.

In North Rhine Westphalia: Dietmar Gaisenkersting, 37, a teacher in Duisburg, and Elisabeth Zimmermann, 48, a specialist adviser in Essen.

In Hesse: Helmut Arens, 55, who has worked for 30 years in the chemical industry in Frankfurt am Main, and Markus Klein, 31, a senior nurse in Augsburg.

In Saxony: Endrik Bastian, 41, a nurse in a Berlin home for the disabled, and Christoph Vandreier, 24, a student of psychology.

Media interest in the PSG's election campaign is significantly greater than in previous elections. Even during last year's European elections, when the party stood candidates nationwide, the number of inquiries and interviews was far smaller.

There are numerous reasons for this. The federal elections were brought forward by a year and the timing of their announcement reduced the period in which parties could collect the required number of signatures to be placed on the ballot. Many parties were not in a position to fulfill this condition, resulting in fewer parties contesting the elections in many states.

However, there is another, more important factor. At every political level, including the editorial offices of the newspapers and broadcast outlets, a crisis of perspective and a sense of perplexity predominate. It has become obvious that the government has no answer to the enormous social problems that confront Germany. In spite of drastic cuts in wages, working conditions and social services, unemployment has increased to record levels.

It is not only on internal questions that Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's government faces a crisis. Its foreign policy is also in tatters. The expansion of the European Union (EU) to the east has increased social tensions across the entire continent. The EU

constitution has been rejected. Conflicts in the Balkans and Afghanistan, where German troops are deployed, have increased, and Germany's attempts to obtain a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council have been stalemated.

Both Schröder (Social Democratic Party, SPD) and Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party) are more than prepared to hand over political power to the conservative Christian Democratic Union/Social Christian Union parties, but these too have no answer to Germany's crisis. They stand for the same policies as the SPD and Greens, only in a more aggressive form. Intensifying social conflicts are therefore certain, irrespective of who wins the election. The next government will be characterised by growing political instability.

The increasing media interest in the PSG is one expression of the crisis of the political establishment. Veteran media employees—camera personnel, sound technicians, journalists—have indicated a keen interest in the policies of the PSG. Discussions have at times continued long after the camera and microphone were turned off.

Nevertheless, this interest has not been reflected in the editorial boards in these organisations, which have generally seen to it that only a few "catchy" phrases, often placed in a misleading context, were broadcast.

A typical example was the tape made by a reporting team from the Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg (RBB), a state public television and radio broadcaster. The RBB had planned to include a short report in its half-hour evening news program about smaller parties contesting the elections in Berlin. The reporting team conducted a long and interesting interview with Ulrich Rippert, Berlin parliamentary candidate and the chairman of the PSG. At the end of the interview, the sound technician declared his surprise at learning that the PSG was connected to the *World Socialist Web Site*. He acknowledged that he had followed the web site for some time and had read many of its articles.

In the end, only two minutes of film were broadcast, embedded between two separate reports on anarchist-type parties. One of these organisations is called simply the Party, and was founded by the satiric magazine *Titanic*. It demands the re-erection of the Berlin Wall in order to put Angela Merkel, chancellor candidate of the Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union and resident of the former East Germany, back behind the Wall. Immediately after the report on the PSG came another on the Pogo Party of Germany, which campaigns for more alcoholism.

Below is the text of the entire interview conducted with the RBB by Rippert:

RBB: Why is the PSG standing in the federal elections?

Rippert: Our aim is to build an international workers party that fights uncompromisingly for the interests of working people and the interests of the unemployed, pensioners and youth. All other parties standing in the election represent a grand coalition for the dismantling of the social and welfare state. All have only one answer to unemployment and massive social problems: enrich the wealthy at the expense of the poor.

RBB: A new party—why don't you participate in the new "Left Party?"

Rippert: The Left Party led by Oskar Lafontaine and Gregor Gysi advocates a completely nationalist and reformist program, based on the existing capitalist system. In contrast, we fight for an international socialist program that unites all workers in all countries and strives for the overthrow of capitalism.

Lafontaine's argument, that it is possible to pressure the SPD to the left, is false. Previous years have shown that pressure from below has only served to move the SPD even further to the right. When thousands of people took to the streets last year in the Monday demonstrations against Hartz IV and Agenda 2010, Schröder and [SPD chairman] Müntefering answered: "We will not allow ourselves to be pressured from the streets." Continuing this pattern, the current election is an ultimatum to the people. The SPD would rather hand over the reins of power to Angela Merkel and the Union than move to the left.

Incidentally, we've already had experiences with this theme here in Berlin. Here, those who are now in the Left Party have participated in state government with the SPD for a number of years. Many senators and the current minister for the interior are members of this party. Has the so-called "red-red" government brought any kind of improvement for the people? No. On the contrary! The social situation here in Berlin has catastrophically degenerated. The arrogance and ruthlessness with which the ministers of the PDS—now the Party of the Left—carry out their policies are only surpassed by their incompetence.

The argument that "in view of the practical constraints no other course of action is possible," is not only cowardly, but false. No one is forcing these senators to go along with the right wing policies of [SPD Mayor] Wowereit. Socialists have never taken up social problems from the standpoint of adapting to them, but rather of overcoming them and changing society.

RBB: What are your three most important demands?

Rippert: We are a party like no other. We do not just say: "Here are our three magic words, vote for us, and everything will be better!" That is completely unserious. We do not balk at saying to people: The problems are much more fundamental than they appear at first glance. Indeed, at the beginning of our election manifesto we say that the population is not only confronted with the bankruptcy of the SPD-Green coalition government, but of a historical crisis of the capitalist system. It is not just about mass unemployment and the destruction of social services, but also about increasing militarism and war.

In order to resolve these problems, it is necessary that the great majority of the working population become politically active and

themselves take the political initiative. Steps in this direction were the demonstrations against the government's Hartz IV policies and, before that, the huge protests against the war in Iraq, and more recently, the rejection of the draft EU constitution in France and Holland. But this resistance needs a program. It cannot remain confined to the level of simple protests. Such a program needs to encompass three fundamental points:

First, it must be international. Not a single problem confronting workers today can be resolved within the confines of national borders. Only an international strategy and international cooperation can provide the basis for fighting against global corporations that play factories against one another and extort their workforces. Workers here in Germany must regard themselves not as competitors, but as comrades of workers in Eastern Europe and other cheap-labour countries.

Second, it must be socialist. That means, it cannot be confined to what is and isn't possible within the current capitalist order. There still remains great confusion over this question. The Stalinist dictatorships in the former Soviet Union and in the German Democratic Republic [East Germany] are still being equated with socialism. The fundamental socialist principle that we defend is that on each and every issue, the needs and requirements of the working population must be placed above the profit interests of companies and the employer organisations.

Third, such a mass movement must be politically independent. This means that it must not adapt itself to the SPD, the Left Party or the trade unions, but must base itself on the political lessons and experiences of the last century. In other words, our aim is the political education of the working class to develop a movement which challenges capitalist property relations and prepares the way for a workers government. This is the basis of our collaboration with the *World Socialist Web Site*, a daily socialist Internet newspaper, published in more than ten languages.

RBB: Do you have a particular target group that you are speaking to?

Rippert: We speak to the great majority of the working population and especially to young people. In recent weeks, as we were out gathering signatures for permission to stand in the election, we were in areas where every second young person was without work. Many youth are in a desperate situation. They get the impression on a daily basis that society does not want them, that it has no interest in them. No doors are open to them, creativity and initiative are being destroyed. It is perhaps the worst charge one can level against a society that it scorns and neglects the younger generation.

We address these young people and say: Do not be intimidated! It is necessary and possible to change the state of things. But you have got to make a serious turn to political ideas and perspectives. Study history! Read the work of Leon Trotsky and participate in the work of the WSWs.



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