Berlin election: Socialist Equality Party defends its perspective on German television

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On September 5, the public television channel for the state of Berlin and Brandenburg (RBB) invited candidates from the smaller political parties currently standing in the Berlin state election to take part in a talk show.

As one of the parties participating in the election, which takes place on Sunday, September 17, the Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, PSG) was able to briefly put the case for a socialist political perspective on the programme. Amongst the other parties taking part were a number of right-wing groupings, in addition to a host of organisations that concentrate on single-issue politics.

There is a tradition in the German media of allowing smaller political parties—i.e., those without representation in parliament—to present their programme, and such broadcasts are produced in one form or another by the state television channels for every major election. In the main, the moderators involved go to some lengths to present the parties in a ridiculous fashion and prevent any serious discussion. Their efforts have been facilitated in the past by the participation in elections of thoroughly unserious groupings, such as the Auto Party or the Beerdrinkers Party.

In recent years, however, a development has taken place, which was also evident in the September 5 telecast. A number of parties have emerged that reflect the broad discontent on the part of many social layers with the entire political establishment. On last Tuesday's programme, each of the parties had just three to four minutes to answer questions put to their representatives by the moderators.

Tanja Adamek, speaking on behalf of the Parents Party, explained that she is standing as a candidate because she does not believe that any of the established parties represent the interests of parents of poor families. She appealed for substantially increased revenues for schools and kindergartens to be derived from taxes. She also called for a redistribution of wealth from the rich to the less well-off.

Jens Oelschlägel, from the German Party for the Unemployed, then declared that none of the existing parties defended the rights of unemployed persons. On occasion, he put forward very limited and even somewhat reactionary political views, but at the same time reflected the needs of many in German society when he called for the introduction of an unconditional basic income.

In addition to these initiatives, there were also some parties taking part that described themselves as left-wing or liberal, and put forward a more developed political programme. The Alliance for Health, Peace and Social Justice (AGFG), led by the controversial physician Dr. Rath, calls for the nationalisation of 51 percent of every major concern, as well as tax limits on profits. The Humane Economy Party draws upon the theories of Silvio Gesell, who advocates the abolition of interest rates as a solution to social problems—albeit within the bounds of the capitalist system.

Lucy Redler, candidate of the Election Alternative, Labour and Social Justice (WASG), demanded a redevision of wealth within the context of existing social relations. In response to a question from the audience as to how the WASG could justify its opposition to the policies of the Left Party-Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) in Berlin, when on a national level the WASG sought to merge with the Left Party, Redler responded merely by saying that her organisation was opposed in particular to the policies of the PDS in Berlin.

The only candidate who directly addressed the issue

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of the political basis to be established for the much-demanded redistribution of social wealth was Christoph Vandreier, one of the three candidates of the PSG standing in the election. Moderator Andreas Schneider began by quoting from the PSG election programme: “Instead of remaining passive and disinterested, ever-larger sections of the population are demonstrating their hostility to official politics. This is a development we welcome!... While politicians and journalists warn against social conflict, we see our task in preparing and directing such a development in a progressive direction.” Schneider then accused the PSG of aiming to implement a violent revolution.

Vandreier made clear that the programme made no mention of violence to achieve its ends. “Nevertheless, it is necessary to assert that such a rebellion is necessary,” he said. “Our society is completely dominated by the interests of a tiny elite, and in every sphere: politics, economics and culture. That is exactly what we are experiencing with the social disaster in Berlin.”

Vandreier stressed that the political work of the PSG was aimed at providing a socialist orientation to the increasing popular resistance: “Our task consists of developing socialist consciousness. Social protests such as those against the Hartz IV laws [restrictive legislation aimed at the unemployed], or the Iraq war, which failed to articulate any clear programme and which were left without leadership, are insufficient. Such protests require first and foremost a political perspective. The population must understand that this society is organised against their interests and in favour of the profit interests of a narrow layer. This spiral can only be broken when working people intervene in events as an independent political factor. The working population must become conscious of their own interests.”

Vandreier stressed that such a workers’ movement required not only a socialist, but also an internationalist programme: “We have always explained that we do not believe that the social problems and the social disaster unravelling can be resolved in Berlin alone. We confront social tensions here, which have their roots in international developments—such as the brutal wars in Lebanon or Iraq. This demands an international mobilisation of the working population.”

Moderator Schneider, who repeatedly attempted to present the PSG and its members as rabble-rousers intent on encouraging violence, interrupted Vandreier during his brief contribution on a number of occasions. In was notable that Schneider took a very different approach in his discussion with Udo Voigt, the leader of the neo-fascist German National Party (NPD). The latter was allowed to propagate his racist nostrums without interruption—including calls to separate children in schools and kindergartens on an ethnic basis, to deprive foreigners of any social security support, and to repatriate immigrants.

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