

Germany: War, social cuts and the role of the Left Party-PDS

By Socialist Equality Party
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The Left Party-Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the WASG (Election Alternative) group organized a conference January 19-21 at Frankfurt University under the slogan “Get up, stand up.” The aim of the conference was to create “a new left university federation.” The Socialist Equality Party intervened with the following statement to expose this attempt to establish a new left cover for the right-wing policies of the Left Party.

The war in Iraq inaugurated a new stage of open imperialist aggression. Although a clear majority of the US population cast their votes against the Iraq war in the November midterm elections, the Bush administration is currently expanding the war, escalating its troop presence and undertaking intensive preparations for a military strike against Iran. The goal of the Bush administration is to secure US economic and strategic supremacy through control of the most important sources of raw materials. A military build-up, which could even include the deployment of tactical nuclear bombs, is taking place before the eyes of a fearful world public.

This militarization of official politics is not limited to the US, but is being pursued by all the great powers. Behind the diplomatic smokescreen, Germany and Europe are feverishly seeking to catch up in terms of rearmament in order to impose their own imperialist interests through the use of force. The restructuring of the German armed forces and the European army, and an independent European armaments industry, are being pursued at great speed.

The increasing conflicts between the great powers over energy supplies, sources of raw materials and markets increasingly recall the period prior to the beginning of the First World War nearly a hundred years ago.

No social problem can be regarded outside of, or independently of, this intensified international situation. Social cuts and the dismantling of democratic rights go hand in hand with military rearmament. Frequently, the savings made through welfare cuts are diverted directly into the budget of the military.

The necessity for a broad political movement, which combines the struggle against war and militarism with the social question, is posed with extreme urgency and the construction of such a movement requires a worked-out strategy.

Increasing militarism and welfare cuts have their roots in a social order that is based on private ownership of the means of production and the nation state. Today’s economy is controlled by transnational corporations and international finance companies, which roam the planet in search of cheap workers, low taxes and raw materials. Workers in one country are played off against workers in another, utilizing the low wages in China and other countries to depress wages and social standards around the globe.

The interests of the broad majority of the population are incompatible with this social order and the social crisis cannot be overcome within the context of existing capitalist conditions. Demonstrations and “pressure from below” are in and of themselves insufficient to stop the attacks on social and democratic rights and the drive to militarism and war. To successfully wage such a fight requires a political movement that struggles for the reorganization of society on a socialist basis.

Such a mobilization against war and social cuts can only be successful if it is consciously directed against the policy of the Left Party-PDS and the WASG. Both of these organizations are carrying out a policy that is both cynical and duplicitous. They employ worn-out left-sounding clichés in an effort to capture the leadership of protest campaigns, only to cave in and add their vote in favour of social cuts and military deployments at the crucial moment.

In those regions and cities where the Left Party-PDS has assumed government responsibility, its politics are indistinguishable from those of Germany’s main bourgeois parties. The Left Party’s pose as a force opposed to war and militarism is determined by the fact that at the national level the party is limited to an opposition role. Left Party leaders Gregor Gysi and Oscar Lafontaine have long since signalled that they are also prepared to cooperate on this question. There is nothing to distinguish their brand of pacifism from that of the Green Party, which has already demonstrated how quickly such a party can be won over to support military operations by the German army.

The fact that a mayor belonging to the Left Party recently led the swearing in of new German army recruits at an official ceremony in the East German state of Thuringia says more on this question than pages of party congress resolutions and policy statements. Many groups—falsely terming themselves “left,” “socialist” or even revolutionary—are cooperating with the Left Party in the name of a “broad left alliance”; virtually no one dares to openly condemn the right-wing, opportunist policies of this organization. It is only on this basis that a party in alliance with the Social Democratic Party could impose far more stringent social cuts in the state of Berlin than exist in many other conservative-led states—and still seek to pose as a left-wing and progressive force.

We decisively reject this cowardly adaptation to the Left Party. One of the most important conditions for a successful struggle against war and welfare cuts consists in taking a sober look at reality and calling things by their real names. With respect to the Left Party, this means a relentless campaign to unmask their anti-social and reactionary politics.

Six years ago the Left Party took power in the Berlin Senate in a coalition with the SPD following the collapse of Bankgesellschaft

Berlin (Berlin Bank Co.). The first official measure of this so-called “red-red senate” was to assure financial guarantees to the private owners and shareholders of Bankgesellschaft Berlin through a loan amounting to €21.6 billion.

The Senate then went on to introduce one draconian measure after the other: 15,000 jobs were cut in the city’s public services, with a further 18,000 to go over the next five years; the state government withdrew from the local employers’ association, in order to bypass the existing collective agreement and cut salaries by around 10 percent; 3,000 jobs were slashed and a 10 percent wage cut imposed for Berlin transport workers; massive cuts in jobs and wages were imposed in the city’s hospitals; 34,000 one euro per hour jobs were created to replace regular jobs; drastic increases in fees together with reduced personnel for kindergartens were imposed; parents fees were introduced for school materials along with a reduction of teachers in schools; cuts of around €75 million were made at Berlin’s three universities; the housing association GSW, with 65,000 dwellings, was sold off to US investor and speculator Cerberus.

The list goes on. This represents just a selection of the most important points in the long list of right-wing measures carried out by the city’s Left Party-SPD coalition.

The Berlin Senate leads the entire country in terms of the attacks made on social security benefits and public services, with drastic consequences for many workers and their families. The number of industrial jobs has fallen dramatically and the official unemployment rate in Berlin stands at 18.1 percent. Almost 250,000 of the city’s 3.3 million inhabitants are dependent on what was formerly known as “social welfare assistance” and which today is called “Unemployment-2.” Poverty has now reached levels in Berlin comparable to the worst years of the 1920s. According to official data, every fifth child grows up in poverty.

The Left Party has shown its true face in Berlin and the east German state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, where it is also in power. It has no right to pose as a “left” or “socialist” party. On every concrete question the party’s senators for Economics and Labour, Science, Research and Culture, Health and Social Policy have implemented policies reflecting the interests of big business and the banks at the expense of the population. The party then received its just deserts in the elections of last autumn, when it lost half of its votes.

It is not, however, merely the social effects of such policies which are catastrophic. To the extent that the Left Party drives more and more families into poverty and despair in the name of a “left-wing policy,” it creates politically fertile soil for extreme right-wing demagogues. It is no accident that neo-fascist organizations such as the German National Party and other right-wing extremists have been able to increase their influence precisely in those regions where the former Party of Democratic Socialism was, or is still active, in government.

A look across the border also shows what happens when a party seeks to combine socialist phraseology and clichés with the defence of the capitalist order.

A few years ago the Italian Refounded Communism (Rifondazione Comunista-RC), which cooperates with the PDS at the European level, was held up as a role model for the renewal of the left in Europe. The organization played an active role in demonstrations against the Iraq war.

Today it is firmly entrenched in the camp of the political establishment. As a component of the right-wing government of Romano Prodi, the RC vigorously campaigned last summer for the

intervention of Italian troops in Lebanon. Its leader Fausto Bertinotti is parliamentary speaker in Rome and holds the third-highest office in Italian politics.

In France, the Revolutionary Communist League (Ligue communiste révolutionnaire-LCR) has been agitating for the past two years for a “broad left alliance” with the French Communist Party—another European partner of the Left Party-PDS. For its part, however, the CP refuses to break with the French so-called Socialist Party, with which it has cooperated for no less than 35 years. Under such conditions the broad opposition in France to war and welfare cuts has been robbed of any independent representation in the country’s upcoming presidential elections. Two main candidates are standing—Ségolène Royal of the Socialist Party and Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy of the ruling Gaullist UMP—both of whom are trying to outdo one another in terms of the right-wing, law-and-order policies they offer to the electorate.

The Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit-PSG) stands for the construction of a political movement that is completely independent of the SPD, the Left Party and the trade unions and fights for a reorganization of society on a socialist basis.

The fight against unemployment, welfare cuts and war must be conducted on the basis of the powerful traditions of the Marxist movement. As the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the PSG bases itself on the lessons from the great struggles of the past. The Fourth International is living proof that there is a Marxist alternative to social democracy and Stalinism, which—both in Moscow and in East Germany—falsely claimed to represent the Marxist tradition.

Leon Trotsky founded the Fourth International in 1938 to defend the program of socialist internationalism against Stalinism. The roots of the Fourth International are traced to the Left Opposition, which had fought against the degeneration of the Soviet Union since 1923. During the period when social-democratic and Stalinist parties dominated the workers movement it was possible to isolate the Marxist tradition. Now, however, the political bankruptcy of these bureaucracies opens up a new historical epoch, in which the Fourth International is increasing its influence. It has a medium in the form of the *World Socialist Web Site*, which has rapidly won an extensive international readership and is recognized as the authentic voice of Marxism.

We therefore call upon all students and youth who wish to seriously take up the struggle against war and social cuts to contact the Socialist Equality Party and the editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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wsws.org/contact