

Berlin district office cancels meeting room for PSG meeting on May 1

By Editorial Board
23 April 2007

On Friday April 20, the Berlin district of Tempelhof-Schöneberg declared that the Schöneberg city hall would be closed for meetings on May 1. This decision has immediate consequences for the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) in Germany.

The PSG had planned an important meeting for May 1, at which the David North, the chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* and secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in the US was to give a lecture on the historical role and current significance of Leon Trotsky.

In preparation for this meeting, at the end of March the PSG applied for the use of a room in Schöneberg city hall. The clerical officer responsible for such bookings at the district office confirmed the PSG application by telephone. The Schöneberg city hall has a long tradition of holding political meetings. Its rooms have been used for many years by all of Germany's established parties, as well as a variety of other political and cultural organisations. The PSG has also organised a number of meetings in the past at these premises.

A few days later, and following an enquiry from the PSG, the responsible officer informed the PSG that he had already noted the meeting and registered it in the appropriate register. A written confirmation was only a formality, he maintained, since political meetings are invariably agreed to by the responsible town councillor. This could take some time, however, the officer noted, because of intervening Easter holidays.

Following a further request, the illness of a woman employee was given as an additional reason for a further delay, but it was once again stressed that the PSG could be assured of confirmation, and apologies were extended for the delay.

On April 17, the PSG was then informed by telephone that a district committee meeting had decided “completely unexpectedly” to close the Schöneberg

city hall for meetings on May 1. On April 20—i.e., three weeks after the initial application—the decision confirming the rejection of the room application was conveyed to the PSG in writing. The head of the district office declared bluntly in the letter that the district office had “decided not to open the Schöneberg city hall for meetings on May 1 2007.” No reason was given for the decision. Instead, the letter merely noted that the PSG had regrettably “also” been affected by the decision.

This raises the question: Is this decision deliberately directed against the PSG meeting, and is the right to public assembly being denied through patently bureaucratic arguments and methods?

It should be noted that the city hall is open all year round for public meetings—including, as in previous years, on May 1. This was confirmed by the responsible officer, who assured the PSG that he would never had confirmed the meeting if he had been aware that the facility would be closed. He went on to stress that in the seven years during which he was responsible for booking rooms, there had never been such a decision by the district committee. According to his knowledge, there was no structural or technical reason that would justify such a decision.

In addition, the PSG request had been made weeks before and was well known at the time of the councillor's meeting. In a misleading manner, the letter from the district administration inserts the word “also,” although the fact is that no other organisation apart from the PSG had requested rooms on that day. This was also confirmed by the responsible officer, who showed a representative of the PSG the appropriate entry in the meeting book.

In other words: There was no valid for the district office to cancel the meeting and no other party or

organisation, apart from the PSG, that was affected by this decision. It is entirely reasonable to assume, therefore, that the decision to close the city hall was deliberately directed at preventing the PSG meeting. This would constitute a direct attack on the fundamental democratic right of the freedom of assembly.

Those parties represented in the district office appeared to have concluded that it is impermissible for a Trotskyist party to organise a meeting over the socialist alternative to Stalinism and capitalism on the day traditionally associated with international workers' solidarity. The mayor of the district is, together with two other town councillors, affiliated to the Social Democratic Party (SPD), another town councillor is a member of the Green Party, and the two remaining members of the district committee are members of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

Upon being asked, the social-democratic district mayor Ekkehard Band explained that all six town councillors had attended the meeting and had left the decision up to the "councillor responsible for building," Bernd Krömer (CDU). Any inquiries were to be addressed to him. The office of town councillor Sibyll Klotz (the Greens) also refused to give any information and referred to CDU councillor Krömer, who, for his part, refused to discuss the matter either in person or by telephone.

This is not the first time the PSG has had problems with this district administration. In the summer of last year, the PSG requested permission to hold an election meeting in the Schöneberg city hall. District councils are obliged to make rooms available during an election campaign for certified parties, but the Schöneberg council responded by allocating the extreme right-wing German National Party a room directly adjoining to that allocated to the PSG—and without even informing the PSG of its decision. This represented a direct hindrance to the PSG election campaign.

Now, the same district office has gone one step further.

The PSG has undertaken legal measures against this decision and calls upon its supporters to send letters of protest to councillor Bernd Krömer, district mayor Ekkehard Band and the other town councillors:

Ekkehard Band (SPD district mayor)

Dieter Hapel (CDU deputy district mayor)

Dr. Sibyll Klotz (Green Party town councillor)

Angelika Schöttler (SPD town councillor)

Bernd Krömer (CDU town councillor)

Olive Schworck (SPD town councillor)

Address: Rathaus Schoeneberg, John F-Kennedy-Platz, 10820 Berlin

Fax: Town Mayor Band (030) 7560 2200

Fax: Councillor Kroemer (030) 7560 4680

Please send copies of all protest letters to:

E-mail: psg@gleichheit.de

Postal Address: PSG, Postfach 040 144, 10061 Berlin



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact