

# Berlin district council meeting upholds ban on PSG meeting

## Councillor admits decision politically motivated

**Our reporter**  
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On Wednesday evening, April 26, the head councillor for the Berlin district of Tempelhof-Schöneberg, Bernd Krömer (CDU), openly admitted that the decision to close the district's city hall on May 1 was politically motivated and aimed at preventing the meeting planned for that day by the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party, PSG). A session of the council voted to uphold the ban on the PSG's meeting.

The PSG had first lodged its application on March 30 requesting a room in the Schöneberg city hall for a public lecture to be held under the title "In Defence of Leon Trotsky: A Reply to the Post-Soviet School of Falsification." The city hall is normally open throughout the year and has invariably been open on May Day in past years. The PSG application was then confirmed by telephone by the city hall officer responsible for room bookings. More than two weeks later, on April 17, a meeting of the district council then decided to close the city hall on May 1, thereby preventing the PSG meeting from going ahead.

The PSG has taken immediate legal action aimed at reversing the district council decision, which it regards as an attempt to prevent its May Day meeting, thereby violating the PSG's right to assembly and for equal treatment with all other political organisations.

The city hall also features an exhibition devoted to the life of the SPD politician Willy Brandt, which is open throughout the year. Groups of visitors had applied to visit the exhibition on May 1, but it has now been announced that the exhibition will be closed on that day—an obvious move to avoid the impression that the closure of the hall was aimed solely at the PSG.

The district council meeting (BVV), which consists of 60 elected delegates (Social Democratic Party, SPD 19; Christian Democratic Union CDU, 17; the Greens, 10;

FDP, 4; the Greys, 3; and the Left Party/PDS and Election Alternative group (WASG), both with one delegate) was held at the city hall on Wednesday. The session confirmed that the decision made against the PSG meeting was politically motivated.

Prior to the meeting, the BVV delegate from the WASG, Christoph Nitschke, had put forward a motion that the issue of the PSG room application be discussed as an urgent item on the agenda of the BVV meeting. The motion to discuss the issue was agreed, and a debate correspondingly took place at the end of the meeting.

Also prior to the meeting, PSG members distributed a letter to those delegates attending the BVV session that was held in one of the large assembly halls in the Schöneberg city hall. The letter contained an account of the events leading up to the decision to close the hall on May 1.

The PSG letter to the BVV delegates described the chain of events leading up to the decision to close the city hall on May Day and stated:

"We ask you at today's meeting to reject the action taken by town councillor Krömer (CDU) and call upon the district office to confirm and agree the meeting which was booked by the PSG four weeks ago.

"We appeal to your democratic sense of responsibility!

"It cannot be allowed that a party be suppressed with bureaucratic methods and denied its fundamental right to freedom of assembly and equal treatment.

"We all live in a country in which bureaucratic arbitrariness and the suppression of democratic rights had devastating consequences in the past and cannot be tolerated today.

"You, as elected district officers, bear the responsibility to prevent the autocratic behaviour of a few individual town councillors and guarantee democratic relations in the

district office.”

Christoph Nitschke introduced the discussion and drew attention to the fact that an impartial and objective evaluation of the facts and the chain of events made clear that the first-ever closure of the city hall on the forthcoming May 1 was directly bound up with efforts to prevent the planned PSG meeting from taking place.

Following Nitschke’s remarks, other BVV delegates made derogatory comments about the application made by the PSG, making clear their contempt for basic democratic rights. Contributions made by representatives of the SPD and CDU were aimed at insulting the PSG and mocking a party that did not belong to the corrupt establishment in the city hall, but dared to book a room on its premises. According to these forces, the PSG has no right to free assembly.

A delegate from the SPD asked whether “this left-wing group” had provided alternative dates and whether these had also been rejected, while another CDU delegate queried why “a small, left-wing group” needed to hold such a meeting in the tradition-steeped Schöneberg city hall on a topic in which hardly anyone was interested. Then town councillor Bernd Krömer (CDU) took the floor.

As Krömer took up his position to speak, the chairman of the PSG, Ulrich Rippert, who was attending the meeting as a visitor, requested permission to speak to the assembled delegates. Rippert’s request was turned down on several occasions with the reference to the official agenda for the meeting. Krömer then began with the words:

“I do not have to hide behind the official agenda. There is an established practice at the Schöneberg city hall and the district office for the allocation of rooms, which requires that we actually check the applications by certain groups to the district office and only then make a decision....

“It is not a question of whether we are dealing here with any sectarian group, which belongs to the Fourth International and is left-wing extremist, and whose influence is pretty much about zero. That does not bother us....

“The district office had in fact dealt with this question on April 17, and in coordination with our colleagues we are of the opinion that the city hall does not have to be kept open for such a left-wing troupe. In addition, I stress that this ‘meeting’ does not automatically acquire premises in the city hall. We then decided on the closure. I am absolutely in agreement with this—it is correct, it is

the first time the city hall has been closed....

“I am in fact in agreement with the position put by [another delegate, whose name is unclear] who declared that she did not see why it was necessary for such a troupe to hold its meeting in Schöneberg city hall on May 1 and for the hall to be kept open on a public holiday. The meeting can also take place in—I will not now say in a telephone box—but in some other place....”

Following the statements by councillor Krömer, which made absolutely clear that the resolution agreed by the district office was a political decision directed against the PSG, Christoph Nitschke spoke once more: “Mr. Krömer, regarding what you have just said, the issue here is not the size or influence of a party. It is about a basic democratic right and equal treatment. So far as I understood, you evidently allocate rooms on the basis of the party programmes....”

Whereupon Bernd Krömer answered: “There are obviously uses which are politically and publicly relevant and which are desirable for the district. Of course, we have nothing to criticise in applications for rooms made by the SPD, the CDU, the Greens, the FDP or the WASG. It is naturally different in the case of this left-wing extremist party. In such a case we have to look more closely....”

Krömer’s statement at this point in the BVV session was unequivocal and only served to confirm that the decision to close the city hall on May 1 was taken precisely to prevent the meeting planned by the PSG from taking place. Following Krömer’s intervention, a vote was taken at which the majority of BVV delegates then decided to support his decision and confirm the closure of the city hall. During the coming days, the PSG intends to intensify its political and legal campaign to reverse this blatant attack on its constitutional rights.



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