

The G8 summit and the Left Party of Germany

Felix Faber
2 June 2007

“Another world is possible” is the official slogan for the international demonstration against the G8 summit set for June 2 in the northern German city of Rostock. Among those who have signed the appeal are representatives of the Attac movement, the German public services trade union Verdi, Greenpeace, the French Young Socialists and Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), as well as Christian Ströbele (the Greens) and two leaders of the Left Party (now known simply as The Left), Oskar Lafontaine and Gregor Gysi.

The appeal focuses on such issues as war, global warming, immigration and the impoverishment of underdeveloped nations. The drive for profit by international financial interests and the predatory pro-corporate policies of the eight biggest capitalist nations are criticised, but nothing is said about the social situation in these countries.

A total of six demands are made: a remission of debts for poorer countries, a switch to renewable energy sources, an end to nuclear energy, opposition to racism and fascism, world peace, and a halt to the privatisation of public goods and services.

Upon reading the document one is struck by the way in which the authors have sought out the lowest common political denominators. The appeal repeatedly condemns, but offers no analysis and is riddled with declamatory slogans lacking any explanation. A series of topics are dealt with in complete isolation, and none of them are thought through to the end. It could be argued that this is, after all, only an appeal, but, in fact, it evinces a continuity of form and content.

Not one of the demands is concretised or explained. For example, the Iraq war is not even mentioned. Instead, the document merely deplores war in general.

Under such conditions even the most modest “demands” are transformed into utterly non-committal generalities open to a wide variety of interpretations. This is, in fact, the aim of the appeal, which has been drawn up by political veterans whose political careers and practice are well known.

A good illustration is the German party that now calls itself “The Left,” and whose representatives in the Left Party/PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) have shared power in the Berlin Senate with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) since 2002. With respect to The Left, it is worth examining the only

demand in the G8 protest appeal that deals directly with the social and economic conditions of working people—the demand for a ban on “the sell-off of public goods and services” and “the same social rights and standards worldwide.”

What is the reality for the citizens of Berlin? Under the SPD-Left Party/PDS coalition, 15,000 jobs have been slashed in public service and wages have been cut by 10 percent. The Senate has imposed drastic reductions in salaries and jobs in the city’s public transport system and introduced fees and staff cuts in educational institutions ranging from pre-school nurseries to public schools and universities. The Senate also sold off the state-owned housing company GSW, which controlled 65,000 dwellings, to the US private equity company Cerberus. Berlin has gone further in imposing social cuts than any other German state.

In this connection, the second part of the demand raises an interesting question. Does the call for “the same social rights and standards worldwide” mean that conditions in highly developed industrialised countries should be levelled down to those of the underdeveloped world?

What is the source of this nebulous mixture of left-sounding slogans and right-wing policies?

At the start of this year the decision was made to merge the organisation “Election Alternative and Social Justice” (WASG) and the Left Party/PDS to form the new party, The Left. The WASG was founded in 2004 by former members of the SPD and trade unionists. The Left Party/PDS is the successor party to the ruling Stalinist party of the former East Germany, the Socialist Unity Party (SED).

Although the two partners have different political histories, they have a number of common characteristics, which, in the final analysis, are based on shared social roots.

In its efforts to establish a stable balance of power after World War II, the bourgeoisie in the West was forced to concede considerable social concessions to the working class. This encouraged the development of political reformism, i.e., a policy based on compromise with the ruling class.

The reformist labour bureaucracies acquired a Janus face and were forced to look two ways at once. On the one side, the bureaucracy looked towards its working class clientele and promised social improvement; on the other, it turned its smile

towards the bourgeois state and guaranteed social peace. It was able to enjoy its own advantages and privileges, forming a distinct social grouping with its own interests and dynamics.

The SED represented the parasitic weight of a nationally based labour bureaucracy in an extreme form. It elevated itself above the working class and used every conceivable method to deprive workers of political control.

The state-controlled means of production were at once the source of its power and a threat to that power. On the one hand the bureaucracy's control of the state made it possible for it to monopolise privileges, on the other, its privileged position was in flagrant contradiction to the pronounced aims of the nationalized production. Inevitably this led to the bureaucracy liquidating the nationalised property forms in East Germany and organising the restoration of capitalism.

The globalisation of production and the associated increase in productivity in the 1980s forced nation states to comply to the dictates of international economic processes and undermined the basis for any kind of national reformism, while at the same time remorselessly requiring the East German regime to face up to the realities of the world market. In mortal fear of its own working class, the East German bureaucracy sought to protect its privileged status through a rapid reunification with the West German capitalist state.

The PDS then became the home for all those forces in the former Stalinist bureaucracy which had been unable to integrate themselves into the traditional West German parties, and who felt they had been given a bad deal after reunification. The founding of The Left, after a painful process of adjustment, means that the PDS has finally found its feet on West German soil.

However, the same economic processes that forced East Germany to its knees also left their mark on the representatives of the West German labour bureaucracy. Their privileges and perks were based on their role as arbitrators for big business and enforcers of industrial peace in the factories. For decades in the postwar period they had been able to count on the support and acknowledgment of company boards, on which they themselves held posts. However, as economic development increasingly undermined the basis for reformism, the bureaucracy clung all the more desperately to its privileges. This required that they comply ever more faithfully to the wishes of the employers.

The massive offensive on the part of big business over the past few years, resulting in a huge restructuring of the job market and the creation of new forms of poverty and economic insecurity, led to a wave of resignations from the old bureaucratic apparatuses and parties and a turning away by broad masses from official politics.

However, even though the old bureaucracies were socially alienated from the working class, for many years they retained their sensitivity to social tensions. This was the driving force for the creation of a new political formation aimed at

establishing a new basis for defending the bureaucracy's interests and privileges.

These privileges were based on reformism, and this explains their current appeal to time-worn prescriptions in which no one any longer believes. It is all too apparent that world economy has removed the basis for any credible policy for the working class based on the nation state—but this is precisely the foundation of the national bureaucracies.

A careful class analysis of the social role of The Left reveals them to be reliable props and agents of big business.

The destruction of social infrastructure, the deterioration of living conditions for the working class, insecurity with regard to the future, combined with the ruthless enrichment of a small elite, have undermined the existing mechanisms of social control. Social discontent is increasingly leading to social protest, and so long as the protest evokes no response from the political establishment, masses of people feel driven to take their fate into their own hands. In order to maintain public order, i.e., the capitalist system, new political means are necessary.

Like a good commander, the bourgeoisie seeks to protect its flanks on the left and on the right. The repressive state measures introduced by Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, aimed at protecting the state from its own citizens, together with the introduction of universal surveillance and a turn toward police-state methods, represent the protective mechanism on the right. However, repression alone is not enough. It provides no answer to the origins of social discontent, which then finds new outlets.

A protective mechanism on the left needs to be established. "Allow the masses to conduct their protest. We will ensure that it remains within conformist and safe channels." This is the message of The Left.

After all, who is more adept at controlling and channelling social discontent than those bureaucrats who have spent their whole lives doing nothing else. This is known and accepted by both the bourgeoisie and The Left. They have worked long and closely enough together to be able to trust one another.

"Another world is possible" is the official slogan of the demonstration in Rostock. The aim of those who have organised the demonstration, however, is not to create a new world, but rather to chain the masses of humanity to the rotting foundations of a system that threatens to bury mankind in the rubble of its own collapse.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact