

Gleichheit editorial: “A socialist strategy against militarism and war”

11 September 2007

This following is the editorial of the latest edition of Gleichheit, the bimonthly magazine of the German Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG).

A broad political alliance has called for an antiwar demonstration in Berlin on September 15. The demonstration has been called in connection with votes due to take place in the German parliament (Bundestag) in September and October over an extension of the German army deployment in Afghanistan. The demonstration calls for the withdrawal of German troops from Afghanistan and calls upon Bundestag deputies to vote against any extension of the German military mission.

The cause is entirely justified. It is already clear, however, that the demonstration in common with many other prior peace demonstrations will prove ineffectual. The perspectives of the demonstration organisers—Attac, the Left Party, the Maoist MLPD, peace initiatives, etc.—are inadequate for opposing militarism and in fact represent an obstacle to the construction of a genuine antiwar movement.

The appeal for the demonstration is limited to putting pressure on government parties. It states that a withdrawal of German forces from Afghanistan “would also pressurise the Bush administration to withdraw US troops.” It does not reject in principle intervention by the German government in Afghanistan, but instead calls for military measures to be replaced by diplomatic means: “Military power politics following economic interests must give way to disarmament, civil conflict management and diplomatic negotiations.”

At no point is any attempt made to explain the origins of the war, nor is any mention made of the fact that Germany is pursuing its own imperialist interests in Afghanistan, just as is the US. No mention is made of the fact the militarism is gaining ground all over the world despite broad popular opposition.

The Afghanistan war is now approaching six years, the

Iraq war is into its fifth—with no end in sight. Washington is currently discussing plans for an attack on Iran, Russia is developing new nuclear missiles, China is building up its own fleet, Japan is rearming and India is advancing its nuclear programme with official US approval. Military rearmament and the development of independent military capacities is also a top priority for the European Union. And Germany, which was limited to purely defensive operations up to reunification of the country in 1990, now belongs to that group of major powers that are most active militarily on a world scale.

What is the reason for this worldwide expansion of militarism? What goals and interests are being pursued? Why do all the established parties—whether nominally left or right—support increasing militarism without exception?

The US Congress controlled by the Democrat Party has agreed to billions for the continuation of the Iraq war. In Germany, Peter Struck (Social Democratic Party—SPD) and the Christian Democratic chancellor, Angela Merkel (CDU), have both pledged to defend German interests in the Hindukusch. On September 5, the ruling grand coalition (SPD-CDU—Christian Social Union) unanimously decided to extend the Afghanistan mission over the coming years. The Green Party also expressly defends the deployment of the German army within the framework of the ISAF mandate. In numerous interviews, Green Party founding member Tom Königs, who is currently UN special ambassador in Afghanistan, has repeatedly called for an increase of German troops in Afghanistan and for the US to stay in Iraq.

It is not possible to conduct a serious struggle against war without dealing with its causes. In light of today’s social reality, broad appeals for peace function merely as a form of tranquilliser. It is not possible to explain the defection of all political parties, including the former Green pacifists, into the militarist camp merely on the basis of the personal characteristics of the parties’ leaderships. There are more fundamental social forces at

work.

Capitalist society is afflicted by two fundamental contradictions. The national state on which it is based is incompatible with the global integration of production, and the private ownership of the means of production by a small, privileged elite is incompatible with the social character of the production process, which involves the collaboration of hundreds of millions of workers.

These contradictions express themselves in a bitter struggle between rival great powers for energy, raw materials, markets and spheres of influence, together with sharp attacks on social gains and the democratic rights of the working population. Both factors are closely connected. The ruling classes can only maintain their privileges and profits by securing a larger portion of global resources and increasing the exploitation of the working class. Militarism serves both ends: imperialist conquest and the suppression of internal conflicts, which is deemed necessary for the pursuit of foreign policy objectives.

The wars against Afghanistan and Iraq are imperialist wars. They are aimed at securing military control over a region that has extensive energy reserves and occupies a crucial geo-strategic position. US imperialism plays the most aggressive role in this respect. The relative financial and economic strength of the once-strongest world power has decreased appreciably since the end of the Second World War. The US is now attempting to compensate for its economic decline with its military supremacy.

But the US is not alone in the pursuit of expansionist interests. The competition for resources has led to an intensification of conflicts between all the imperialist powers—the US, European powers, Japan and Russia. The ruling classes of the so-called developing countries, including China, India and Brazil, are also striving to increase their political influence on the world arena.

The wars against Iraq and Afghanistan are therefore neither the first such wars nor will they be the last. They were preceded by the first invasion of Iraq and the wars against Somalia and Serbia, amongst others. New wars for the redivision of the world and its resources will follow. In the absence of an effective strategy to combat imperialism, there is every danger that new conflicts could explode into a new world war, as was already the case in 1914 and 1939.

The export-oriented economy of Germany is especially dependent on sales markets and imported energy. This means that the German ruling class cannot afford to stand on the sidelines when it comes to control of the Middle

East. This is the real reason for the presence of German armed forces in Afghanistan, Lebanon and the horn of Africa. German interests in Afghanistan are also not new. German imperialism already exerted considerable influence in the region in the first half of the last century.

No party that accepts and defends the capitalist form of property can oppose this development. This is proved by the trajectory of the Greens. The Left Party will undoubtedly follow a similar course. The call made by Left Party leaders Oscar Lafontaine and Gregor Gysi for the withdrawal of German forces from Afghanistan is merely a bargaining chip they bring to the negotiating table in future talks—and will be promptly tossed aside should the possibility arise of forming a government coalition with the SPD.

A debate is already under way in the Left Party over the relative merits of blue and green helmets—whether “good” German army missions under the blue helmet of the UN should be supported, as opposed to the “bad” mandates led by the US. This was the path first trodden by the Greens. It was then only a short stop to the party giving its outright backing to German militarism.

The only social power that can counter militarism and prevent a threatening world war is the international working class, which constitutes the vast majority of the world’s population. Its social interests stand in irreconcilable conflict with the social interests represented by imperialism, and it is the only genuine international class. The struggle against militarism and war is inseparably bound up with the mobilisation of the international working class on the basis of a socialist programme that strives to overcome capitalism and aims to build an egalitarian, democratic world society.

The necessary conditions for such a movement exist. The contrast between rich and poor has taken dramatic forms, and the opposition to social inequality is growing; the reformist parties and trade unions are discredited and no longer in a position to reconcile the working class with capitalism. However, an alternative movement will not develop spontaneously. It requires the building of an international socialist party and a political break with all those tendencies, which, like the Left Party, seek to divert the working class into the arms of the established parties.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact