

German Socialist Equality Party election campaign: For a socialist answer to welfare cuts and war

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The Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG) of Germany is standing candidates in the Hesse state elections in January 2008 in order to provide a political answer to the urgent problems facing working people. The PSG stands for the building of an international socialist party that opposes war and defends democratic rights. The PSG fights for social equality and the eradication of unemployment and poverty.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) has turned its back on working people. It defends the interests of big business and a narrow layer of the wealthy. The programme of the SPD is virtually identical to that of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which is evidenced by the fact that the two are in coalition at the federal level. If in January Andrea Ypsilanti (SPD) were to replace the present Hesse state premier, Roland Koch (CDU), nothing would change politically.

Nor is Oskar Lafontaine's Left Party an alternative. It consists of former SPD functionaries, union bureaucrats and the leftovers of the Stalinist Socialist Unity Party (SED), the ruling party in the former East Germany. It serves up old social democratic prescriptions that have long failed in Germany and internationally. It tries to prevent working people drawing any lessons from the bankruptcy of the SPD.

Wherever the Left Party has taken on government responsibility, its real role has rapidly become clear. The Berlin city legislature, which has been governed for the last five years by a "red-red" coalition of the SPD and the Left Party, leads Germany when it comes to unemployment and the destruction of public services.

The PSG will not make cheap election promises. Genuine social reforms are no longer possible under global capitalism. The days are long gone when social gains could be achieved without challenging the capitalist basis of society.

Only an independent political movement of working people that fights for the reorganization of society on a socialist basis can overcome poverty, unemployment and the danger of war, and use the enormous potential of modern technology for the well-being of all mankind.

The goal of the PSG is to create the basis for such a movement. This requires a clear understanding of the political situation, and the dangers and tasks that result from it, as well as an understanding of the critical experiences of the past century. As the German section of the International Committee the Fourth International, the PSG is based on the political lessons of these historical experiences.

Not a single problem in Hesse can be resolved without confronting the profound changes in the international situation. Regardless the substantial opposition within the population, the danger of war grows from day to day. The war in Afghanistan is entering its seventh year, the Iraq war nearing its fifth, and military interventions are escalating. Washington is developing plans for an assault on Iran, Russia is developing new nuclear missiles, China is developing its own fleet, Japan is rearming, and India

has developed a nuclear programme with the official blessing of the US.

German foreign policy has also undergone a clear change. The grand coalition government in Berlin of the CDU and SPD is systematically stepping up military armament and increasing the deployment of German troops abroad. Germany's export-oriented economy is highly dependent on foreign markets and energy imports. Therefore, the German ruling class will not stand aside when it comes to exerting control over the wealth of energy resources in the Middle East. This is the real reason for the presence of the German armed forces in Afghanistan, in Lebanon and the Horn of Africa.

The revival of German militarism is bound up with sharp attacks on social and democratic rights. This expresses the two fundamental contradictions of capitalist society: The nation state on which it is based is no longer compatible with the global integration of production, and the private ownership of the means of production by a privileged elite is incompatible with the social character of a production process that involves hundreds of millions of workers.

The ruling class can maintain its privileges and profits only by securing for itself a larger share of global resources and increasing the exploitation of the working class.

Increasing numbers of people no longer react to these anti-social policies with passivity and disinterest, but with open hostility. We welcome this, and advance a programme that meets the needs of the population against social reaction and capitalist anarchy.

* For social equality and justice

Jobs, pensions, health care and education are fundamental social rights. They must take priority over the profit interests of big business. To overcome unemployment, a comprehensive programme of public works is necessary, which will create millions of jobs in socially important areas such as education, health care and old age provision, culture and the development of the infrastructure. A guaranteed state pension must provide a secure retirement for all; comprehensive, publicly financed health care and free education up to university level must be guaranteed for all.

Such a social programme presupposes that the economy be rationally organized in the interests of society as a whole, and not according to the profit interests of the most powerful groups of capitalists. The large corporations and financial institutions must be transferred to social ownership and controlled democratically. Small and medium-size enterprises, which struggle for their survival, must be given access to affordable credit, which will ensure the proper payment of their employees. Those with the highest incomes or with excessive incomes derived from the ownership of capital must be heavily taxed, and the proceeds used to finance social spending. To this end, a merely symbolic increase in the highest tax rates is not sufficient.

* For democracy and immigrants' rights

The struggles for democratic and for social rights are closely connected. As long as the wealth of society remains concentrated in a few hands, the workplace is excluded from democratic control. There can be no talk of real democracy with the press and media dominated by large corporations, and education and culture subordinated to a small elite. Spending cuts in the areas of culture and art immeasurably damage society. There is an incontestable link between the glorification of militarism, brutality and egoism and the rejection of the artistic and cultural heritage of earlier times.

The working class has no fatherland. We unreservedly defend the democratic and social rights of refugees and immigrants. We are for the abolition of the discriminatory legislation that governs the lives of foreigners living in Germany and oppose the deportation and criminalisation of refugees. We defend their unconditional right to travel to and live in Germany. The witch-hunting of immigrants serves to split the working class, just like divisions along the lines of religion, skin colour and ethnic origin are used to suppress working people and keep them in check. Refugees and immigrants form an important part of the working class and will play an important role in its coming struggles.

* Against militarism and war

The fight against unemployment and welfare cuts cannot be separated from the struggle against war and neo-colonialism. Working people must have their own, independent answer to the dangers arising from American imperialism. They must reject the policy of reconciliation with Washington followed by Chancellor Merkel and Foreign Minister Steinmeier, and they must equally oppose the imperialist projects pursued by the federal government in Berlin.

We are for the immediate dissolution of NATO and the closure of all American bases in Europe. We demand the immediate withdrawal of Germany's armed forces and all European troops from the Balkans, Afghanistan, the Congo and Africa, as well as from Iraq and the rest of the Middle East.

* For the international unity of the working class

Not a single social problem can be resolved within the limitations of the national state or on a regional basis. Workers must unite across borders to oppose and counter the transnational corporations. We call for the building of the United Socialist States of Europe in opposition to the existing European Union, which is dominated by the major business concerns and banks.

Eighteen years after the collapse of the Stalinist parties and regimes in Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), the Social Democratic Party is disintegrating.

The response of Lafontaine and the Left Party is to keep all those who are turning away from the SPD within the framework of reformist politics, diverting them back behind social democracy through the so-called "red-red" coalitions they form with the SPD.

We completely reject this. The claim that capitalist exploitation can be made more humane and be socially controlled is a fraud. It serves to paralyse the working class and restrain it from revolutionary struggle, while the right wing around Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, Bavarian Premier Günther Beckstein and Hesse Premier Roland Koch increasingly attacks democratic rights and establishes the foundations for a police state.

The decline of the SPD, like the rightward turn of the trade unions, results from deep-going changes in the world economy. Today's economy is controlled by transnational corporations and international financial institutions that scour the world for cheap labour, low taxes and raw materials, playing off one country against another; exploiting the low wages in China and other countries to depress wages and social conditions around the globe.

Instead of regurgitating the old lies about "private property being the social glue" and empty talk of a "social free-market economy," we

welcome the collapse of the SPD. It opens up the road for a socialist perspective, at the centre of which stands the international collaboration of all workers.

Just as capitalism is returning to extreme exploitation, militarism and war, so the working class must once again take up its revolutionary traditions. We base ourselves on the innovations in computing, telecommunications and transportation technology that are the foundation of the global integration of production, and which make possible enormous social progress. For the first time, it is possible to link together the productive energies of mankind world-wide, using machines to carry out much factory work and a large part of clerical work. This enormous increase in the productive power of humanity has created the means to overcome poverty and backwardness all over the world and improve living conditions for all people. However, this requires the revolutionary transformation of society, in order to unleash the productive forces from the chains of private property and place the needs of all at the centre of social development.

The PSG has neither a large apparatus nor wealthy backers and influential supporters. What we offer are a socialist perspective and a powerful tradition.

The Fourth International was established in 1938 by Leon Trotsky in order to defend the programme of socialist internationalism against Stalinism. Its roots go back to the Left Opposition, which fought from its founding in 1923 against the degeneration of the Soviet Union. It is the living proof that there is a socialist alternative to social democracy and Stalinism, the latter which, in both Moscow and East Berlin, falsely claimed to be based on a Marxist tradition. The Fourth International embodies the heritage of hundreds of millions of workers and intellectuals who gave their enthusiasm, energy and often their lives over the past 150 years to establish a more humane, socialist society.

As long as social democracy and the Stalinist parties dominated the workers' movement, it was possible to isolate the Marxist tradition. But the political bankruptcy of these bureaucracies opens up a new historical epoch in which the program of the Trotskyists of the Fourth International finds increasing resonance.

We appeal to all workers, the unemployed, and particularly young people: Support the PSG election campaign! The building of a revolutionary socialist party is an urgent task in the present situation. Play an active part in our election campaign, helping to disseminate political material and hold election meetings. Follow the work of our international organization through our web site at www.wsws.org/de. Contact your friends and acquaintances, form committees of support, and come to our discussion meetings. Distribute this election manifesto over the Internet!

Support the election campaign financially. We call on all supporters of the PSG both at home and abroad to make generous donations to our campaign fund.



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