

Germany: a positive response to the PSG election campaign in Hesse

Our reporters**13 December 2007**

For the past week the Socialist Equality Party (*Partei für Soziale Gleichheit*—PSG) has been conducting its election campaign for the upcoming Hesse state election on January 27. Supporters and members of the party have met with a great deal of interest, with hundreds stopping in the city of Frankfurt to take campaign materials. Thousands of election statements, headed: “Against Social Cuts and the Danger of War—Support the PSG Election Campaign!” have been distributed at schools, universities and other heavily populated areas.

The PSG is the German section of the Fourth International and is working to build a new workers’ party on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program. It is the only party that represents a genuine alternative to both the right-wing policies of the ruling Hesse Christian Democrats (CDU), led by Roland Koch, and the so-called “opposition” comprising the Social Democratic Party, the Greens and the Left Party.

Central issues of discussion at the PSG information tables include the growing social polarization in Germany, the anti-welfare and anti-immigrant policies of the Hesse state government, and the ongoing train drivers’ strike. Virtually all of those who stop to discuss with campaigners have underlined their support for the train drivers, who are “finally showing some opposition.” Many are indignant to learn that the drivers’ strike has been stabbed in the back by other trade unions such as Transnet and Verdi, as well as political organisations such as the German Communist Party (DKP) and the Left Party.

A majority spontaneously drew a link between the train drivers’ struggle against low wages and bad working conditions and their own increasingly difficult social situation. A telecommunications worker declared that he welcomed and fully supported the train drivers’

strike. He reported on the recent sell-out of workers at Deutsche Telekom, organised by the Verdi trade union, which resulted in the outsourcing of 50,000 jobs together with wage cuts of up to 40 percent. “I am really angry,” he said. “The outsourced colleagues receive even less pay and the trade union accepted it anyway. We should have carried out a proper strike and not immediately given in.”

An architecture student in Frankfurt declared that his knowledge of politics was limited, but that in his view the train drivers were doing the right thing. A student financing her own studies admitted that the strike had created problems for her, but was surprised to hear that drivers earn only €1,500 net: “If it’s like that, then of course I am completely behind them. My friend works at the airport and earns just as little. I know very well what it is like to survive on so little money.” Up until recently she had taken little interest in politics, but now declared her interest in attending the PSG election meeting.

Cyril Casper, 26, said: “What is unjust in the case of the train drivers is the fact that they earn so little, although they are carrying out dangerous and burdensome work involving considerable responsibility. They deserve a substantially higher salary, which enables them to live reasonably. The members of the railways executive earn collectively as much as all of the drivers put together. That’s not right.”

Cyril works in a small distilling workshop, which is part of a state-linked rehabilitation project. In addition to his accommodation he receives the miserly income of just €200 per month. At the PSG information stand in Frankfurt-Bockenheim, Cyril reported: “One is pretty much exploited—there is no other way to put it. At the same time the state welfare federation that runs

the project made a substantial profit last year. I work eight hours a day in the workshop doing hard work and take home €200. Often we have to do overtime.

“All my workmates complain and none of us is able to live on the money we earn—although we work really hard for it. We feel it is unfair. It would be much better if people working in the rehabilitation workshops received a proper salary for what they do.”

Cyril is particularly concerned over the huge sums pocketed by leading businessmen, bankers, managers and politicians. A series of media reports have recently described the extortionate salaries of some German managers. Cyril’s reaction is typical. A recent poll by the Allensbach Institute revealed that only 15 percent of the population regarded income distribution in Germany to be fair.

Last year 2 million persons with a full-time job earned less than €7.50 per hour—this represents nearly a tenth of the working population and an increase of over 10 percent compared to 2004. When part-time workers are included then a total of 5.5 million earned less than €7.50 per hour in 2006. Approximately 1.9 million workers received less than €5 gross, an increase of over 20 percent compared to 2004. These figures were released by the *Frankfurter Rundschau* on December 8.

Increasing social polarization is being accompanied with growing attacks on basic democratic rights. Many passers-by declared that they were very dissatisfied with the established parties and were looking for an alternative.

Hesse Prime Minister Roland Koch, who came to power in 1999 following a vicious xenophobic campaign, has repeatedly backed the deportation of foreign workers who lack a proper residency permit. Two years ago the state government even passed a law requiring headmasters and doctors to denounce “illegal” foreigners, including school children, and inform the authorities of incidents where citizens lacked the proper permits. In the city of Frankfurt alone there are estimated to be around 5,000 children and young persons without appropriate residency papers, who do not dare to go to school and live in constant fear of being exposed and rounded up by the police.

The problem of those without valid residence permits was taken up by Abdelaziz at the PSG campaign table at Bockenheim. “People have to live somehow,” Abdelaziz said. “An example is my own uncle, who has

now left Germany because his son was considered to be ‘illegal’ here and was not entitled to go to school. He had lived here for 10 years and had also got married, but never acquired the proper papers. So he emigrated. When his child reached the age of six, he asked himself the question: ‘Shall I stay here or emigrate,’ and then he went to Spain, where his child could at least go to school.

“I think the policies of Roland Koch are too tough. The same applies to other right-wing politicians, but these are the people who have the say in politics all over the world and conduct wars when it comes to furthering their interests and obtaining the highest rates of profits.”

When asked his view on the political parties, Abdelaziz answered: “Up to now I have voted for the Greens. My uncle always said: ‘Vote for the Greens, they are for the environment, they also speak up for foreigners.’ But here in Frankfurt the Greens are in a coalition with the CDU. They have completely lost sight of their goals. They make compromises to stay in power, and to be able to play along with those at the top. But that cannot be the point of politics. It is good to see a new party, which represents the interests of workers.”



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