

# Germany: Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) manifesto for Hesse state elections

2 January 2008

*The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG— Socialist Equality Party) is participating in the January 27 Hesse state elections with its own regional slate of two candidates.*

*The PSG candidates are Helmut Arens, 59, a chemical worker and chairman of the Hesse regional PSG, and Achim Heppding, 53, a social insurance worker and former PSG candidate for the European parliament.*

*Below we publish the election manifesto that is being distributed throughout the state. We ask WSWs readers to help distribute this manifesto. It can be downloaded as a PDF file in German.*

In the Hesse state elections there is one party that is worth joining and fighting for—the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG).

The PSG does not limit itself to criticism and protest. In light of the mounting social disaster and the growing threat of war, we advocate a political programme that can enable working people to intervene in political developments and fundamentally change social conditions.

Social inequality is incompatible with democracy. The level of wealth accumulated by the business elite has reached grotesque proportions. Last year, Porsche boss Wendelin Wiedeking took home €54 million; Deutsche Bank boss Josef Ackermann pocketed €13 million; Deutsche Bahn boss Hartmut Mehdorn made €3.2 million.

The incomes of the CEOs of Germany's top-listed companies have risen by 62 percent since 2002, whereas average gross wages have grown by just 2.8 percent.

It is this financial oligarchy—and not the voters—that determines the course of politics. All the establishment parties do their bidding.

The Hesse state election is marked by a fundamental contradiction.

Millions of people reject the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) state administration led by Roland Koch, who came to power following an ugly, racist campaign. Nine years later, his record is one of social devastation.

Social programmes have been cut by a billion euros. An orgy of privatisation has seen schools, hospitals and public housing and transport sold off for a song. Instead of a guaranteed education there are overcrowded classrooms, shorter school hours and study fees. A quarter of a million Hesse residents depend on welfare. In the banking metropolis Frankfurt one in four children lives in poverty.

A popular sentiment is: Koch must go!

But whom to vote for in his place? There is no alternative from within the spectrum of official politics.

We reject the arguments of the Left Party, which is offering itself as a junior coalition partner to the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Nothing would change politically if in January Andrea Ypsilanti (SPD) took over as head of the Hesse state administration. Not only are the CDU and SPD already united in a grand coalition at the federal level, at the state level as well Koch has relied on the tacit support of the SPD.

Ten years ago, the demand was raised: “The CDU government must go!” At that time, the demand referred to the federal government.

After 16 years of the government led by CDU Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the incoming SPD-Green Party coalition was touted as a “left alternative.” But how did things turn out?

In seven years of government, the SPD and the Greens introduced unparalleled welfare cuts and created the conditions for the present social polarization. They drove a wedge through society with substantial tax cuts for the wealthy, on the one hand, and benefit cuts for working people on the other. While those at the top are swimming in money, those at the bottom have to go cap in hand on welfare.

The claim by the Left Party that it functions as a “left-wing political corrective” and can pressure the SPD to the left is completely contradicted by reality. The SPD has not distanced itself from any of the anti-social policies it first introduced under the so-called Agenda 2010 reforms. The minimal changes it is now proposing in some benefits for the long-term unemployed are just election theatrics.

For its part, wherever the Left Party has taken on government responsibility it has continued the right-wing policies of the SPD and proved its subservience to big business. For six years, the Berlin legislature has been governed by a coalition of the SPD and the Left Party which has even put the Koch administration in the shade when it comes to closing public facilities, cutting jobs and wages, and introducing low-wage jobs.

The Left Party is not an alternative; it is a component part of the political cartel that maintains bourgeois rule.

It is necessary to draw up a political balance sheet and face the fact that none of the official parties represents the interests of the general population.

Herein lies the significance of the participation in the elections of the PSG.

Our participation is an important step in the establishment of an international party whose goal is the socialist transformation of society—a party that consistently opposes war, fights for the defence of democratic rights, and bases itself on the struggle to eradicate poverty and establish social equality.

Anger alone is not a sufficient response to the social decline at one pole of society and the unrestrained accumulation of wealth at the other. Without the active intervention in political developments of broad sections of the working population, nothing will change. Social misery will only intensify.

The decay of democracy is already raising the spectre of racism and national chauvinism. History has shown where this leads. It cannot be permitted for a corrupt elite to plunder and ruin society, plunging it further into the abyss.

We call upon all those who read this election manifesto, whether you are

entitled to vote or not, to actively support the PSG election campaign and participate in the building of this new party. We need assistance distributing leaflets, displaying posters, organizing meetings and disseminating our election statements on the Internet.

The capitalist system can no longer be reconciled with the most elementary needs of the overwhelming majority of the population. The Hesse election is taking place at a time when every day brings more news of the social devastation produced by the profit system.

The American credit crisis has shaken the European and international banking system to its foundations. Following the bailout of the Düsseldorf Industriekreditbank (IKB), the major Swiss bank UBS has written off €9.6 billion in failed investments.

The Saxony Landesbank (State Bank of Saxony), with a “credit risk” of some €43 billion, had to be sold off to the Landesbank Baden-Württemberg (LBBW), with the Saxony state government underwriting €2.75 billion. Thus, taxpayers are forced to pay for the dubious undertakings of the speculators through austerity measures and further cuts in social programmes.

In the past, those who opposed a socialist transformation of society argued that the capitalist “free market” economy could be made more socially responsible. Today, social reality daily proves the opposite.

Global capitalism no longer allows for social reforms. Those, like the Left Party, who claim the contrary are simply deceiving the electorate. The time is long past when social conditions could be improved without challenging the capitalist basis of society. Only a socialist reorganization of society can overcome poverty, unemployment and the danger of war, and utilise the enormous potential of modern technology to secure the well-being of all mankind.

Reality daily disproves the myth that the free play of market forces will produce social progress. Capitalist corporations and the capitalist market cannot organize production rationally. They subordinate all human needs to the drive for profit and the personal enrichment of a privileged minority. The result is relentless social decline, mounting tensions between the great powers, militarism and war.

Whole regions of the world are sinking into indescribable poverty, while a small minority bask in fabulous luxury. The environment is being rapidly destroyed. In the fight for raw materials, markets and strategic advantages, the great powers are once again resorting to military means.

The ruling elite can maintain its privileges and profits only by securing an ever greater portion of global resources and stepping up the exploitation of the working class. That is the background to the Iraq war, the military threats against Iran and the mounting tensions between the US, China, Russia and Europe. As was the case in 1914 and 1933, the crisis of capitalism once again threatens to explode in a world war.

Germany’s export-oriented economy is highly dependent on its access to markets and energy imports. The German ruling class will not stand idly by when it comes to the control of the Middle East’s energy wealth. This is the real reason for the presence of German troops in Afghanistan, Lebanon and the Horn of Africa.

The PSG does not address itself to the governments and politicians who are responsible for war and militarism. We turn to the working people and the youth. Only an independent political movement of the working class can put an end to militarism and war. The fight against war is inseparably bound up with the overthrow of capitalism.

Just as capitalism is once again turning to extreme forms of exploitation, militarism and war, so the working class must return to its revolutionary traditions. The innovations represented by computerisation and revolutionary advances in telecommunications and transportation technology, which form the foundation for the global integration of production, make possible an enormous increase in human productive power. They have created the means to overcome poverty and backwardness all over the world and improve living conditions for all.

But this requires the revolutionary transformation of society, in order to free the productive forces from the chains of private property and place the needs of the population at the centre of social development.

*For a united struggle of working people against the capitalist European Union!*

The European corporations and governments coordinate their attacks on the population by means of the European Union. At the same time, the resistance of workers is increasingly taking on European and international forms. While the German train drivers were striking, French railway workers were shutting down the French rail system. In Britain, post office workers organized strikes against cuts in wages and social benefits. In Poland, nurses took action against the destruction of the health system. In Greece, a 24-hour general strike was held to oppose attacks on pensions and other social benefits.

In all these struggles, workers are confronted by the fact that the trade unions stand on the side of their respective governments. The rightward turn by the reformist parties and unions is directly linked to the hegemony of the transnational corporations and international financial institutions over all aspects of the economy. In the hunt for cheap labour, low taxes and critical raw materials, they play off one country against another and use the low wages in China and other countries to lower wages and social standards throughout the world. There is no more room for social compromise.

The SPD and the unions react by moving ever closer to the German ruling class, taking on responsibility for improving the “international competitiveness” of German enterprises, organizing welfare cuts, dividing German workers against their international brothers and sisters. The sharper the social contradictions, the more decisively they stand at the side of capital and preach the commonality of the interests of workers and capitalists.

The PSG advocates an alternative perspective. We stand for the international unity of the working class, regardless of nationality, skin colour, ethnic origin, religion or sex. Against the European Union of the corporations and banks, we counterpose the program of the United Socialist States of Europe. The international working class is an enormous social force. Our aim is to transform it into a political power which, when unified, can oppose the world-wide financial oligarchy.

*For a political movement independent of the unions, SPD and Left Party!*

The months-long industrial dispute by German train drivers has clearly revealed the transformation of the unions in the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (German Union Federation—DGB). They are acting openly as strike breakers.

The train drivers are merely demanding a part of what they have lost in recent years. Since the railway reforms of 1994, staffing has been halved to 185,000. Work loads have risen accordingly, while wages sank by 10 percent. All this has happened with the blessings of the DGB and the Transnet rail union.

Now, the same unions are accusing the train drivers of destroying the “unity” and “solidarity” of the railway workers. What hypocrisy! In reality, the drivers are seeking to free themselves from a straitjacket—the restrictive contract agreed by management and Transnet. In so doing, they are providing an example for all to follow. This is why the drivers have found such wide support in broad sections of the population who confront similar attacks.

The train drivers strike clearly shows the extent of the transformation of the trade unions. From “social partners” they have become co-managers. The so-called “employees’ delegates” on the supervisory boards of industry have taken over the task of pushing through dismissals and wage cuts and implementing longer work hours. Whether at Volkswagen, Siemens, Opel or Deutsche Telekom, the same picture can be seen everywhere. The unions try to limit every industrial dispute to the

narrowest of frameworks, isolating each struggle and, in the end, strangling it.

Those who today claim that the unions or the SPD represent the interests of workers are only deceiving themselves and others. Not one social or democratic right can be defended without a rebellion against these bureaucratic apparatuses.

The same applies to the Left Party. It does not represent a break with the politics of the SPD. It is a desperate attempt to encourage new illusions in social democratic politics, which have so obviously failed. The Left Party is linked closely to the union bureaucracy. What motivates this party is not the desperate situation that many working people now face, but concern to ensure the stability of bourgeois society.

As long as the SPD was able to offer minimal improvements, or at least the hope of an improvement, the bourgeoisie felt it had no need to fear the violent class struggles that had once rocked the German Empire and the Weimar Republic. But now the SPD has gone so far to the right that it can no longer guarantee the social peace. Hence the attempt of Left Party leaders Oskar Lafontaine and Gregor Gysi to create an SPD Mark II.

The PSG supports the building of factory committees that follow the old revolutionary traditions of the workers' councils (Arbeiterräte). We reject the politics of social partnership.

*For social equality and justice!*

Work, pensions, health care and education are fundamental social rights. They must take priority over the profit interests of the corporations. To overcome unemployment, a comprehensive programme of public works is necessary, which will create millions of jobs in socially necessary areas such as education, care of the sick and elderly, culture and the development of the infrastructure.

We call for a basic income of €1,500 a month for all, high quality health and social care provisions, and free education up to and including the university level for all.

Such a social programme presupposes that the economy is rationally organized in the interests of society as a whole, and not subordinated to the profit interests of the most powerful groups of capitalists. The large corporations and financial establishments must be transferred to social ownership under democratic control. Small and medium-size enterprises must be guaranteed access to low-cost credit, to ensure that their employees receive decent wages and benefits.

Taxes should be raised sharply for those with the highest personal incomes and those whose incomes are derived from ownership capital and wealth, with the revenues used to finance social expenditure. An income of €20,000 per month is enough for anyone! Incomes above this level should be taxed at 100 percent.

*For the defence of democratic rights and the rights of immigrants!*

The struggles for democratic and social rights are closely linked, and in Hesse are of special significance. Roland Koch came to power through a malicious anti-immigrant campaign and has since worsened the conditions for foreigners. A 2005 decree, for example, obliges doctors, head teachers and lawyers to denounce those without identity papers (including children), so that they can be deported.

As long as the wealth of society remains concentrated in a few hands—with the sphere of work outside of any democratic control, the press and media under the sway of large corporations, and education and culture the privilege of a small elite—there can be no talk of real democracy.

The cuts in the areas of culture and artistic training cause society immeasurable damage. There is an incontestable link between the glorification of militarism, brutality and egoism and the rejection of the artistic and cultural inheritance of earlier times.

The working class has no fatherland. We defend without reservation the democratic and social rights of refugees and immigrants. We are for the abolition of legislation that discriminates against foreigners and oppose

deportation and the criminalisation of refugees.

We defend their unconditional right to come and live in Germany. The witch-hunting of immigrants—just like the division of the working class along the lines of religion, skin colour, ethnic origin or sex—serves to suppress all working people.

*Against war and militarism!*

Working people must provide their own, independent answer to the danger of war. They must reject the policy of reconciliation with Washington pursued by Chancellor Merkel (CDU) and Foreign Minister Steinmeier (SPD), just as they must reject the imperialist projects emanating from Berlin.

We are for the dissolution of NATO and the closure of all American bases on European soil. We demand the immediate withdrawal of the German military and all European troops from the Balkans, Afghanistan, Africa, Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

*Build the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit!*

The PSG has neither a large apparatus nor wealthy and influential backers. What we do have to offer are ideas, a programme and a powerful tradition.

We represent the heritage of hundreds of millions of workers and intellectuals who, over the past 150 years, have given their enthusiasm, energy and not infrequently their lives in order to establish a better, more humane, socialist society. Stalinist and bourgeois historiography complement each other in seeking to falsify this history. But in view of the deep crisis of world capitalism, the lessons of the class battles of the past—the defeats and the victories—have great significance.

As the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the PSG rests on these historical experiences. The Fourth International is the living proof that there is a Marxist alternative to social democracy and Stalinism, which in both the Soviet Union and East Germany falsely claimed to represent the Marxist 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 beginning in 1923 against the degeneration of the Soviet Union. In the great Stalinist purges of the 1930s, hundreds of thousands paid with their life, almost without exception standing accused of supporting Trotskyism.

Today, the International Committee the Fourth International embodies the historical continuity of the Trotskyist world movement and, in the form of the *World Socialist Web Site*, has an organ that enjoys a rapidly growing international readership and is increasingly regarded as the authentic voice of Marxism.

We appeal to all workers and the unemployed, and particularly to young people: Support the election campaign of the PSG! The building of a revolutionary socialist party—the PSG—is the most urgent task in the present situation.



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