

Berlin meeting launches SEP European election campaign

Our correspondent
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The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG or Socialist Equality Party in Germany) began its campaign for the forthcoming European election with a successful public meeting in Berlin last Sunday. For over two hours workers, unemployed persons and students discussed a socialist perspective with leading PSG candidates.

Christoph Vandreier, one of the party's candidates, opened the meeting by explaining what experiences the party had in the first stages of its election campaign. In the hundreds of discussions held during the past few weeks, as party members and supporters collected the thousands of signatures necessary to put the PSG on the ballot, he said, working people expressed widespread anger and outrage over the billions the German government had handed to the banks. "Workers realize major social conflicts are on the agenda," he said, "but they are not sure how to act and defend their interests."

Social polarization will rapidly intensify in the next months, Vandreier continued. In such periods political organizations are forced to reveal their true colors. "On what side do they stand? Do they want to defend the power and privileges of the ruling elite and seek to resolve the crisis at the expense of the majority of the population, or do they represent the interests of workers?"

Most workers are clear about the fact that they cannot not rely on the Left Party and the trade unions. They lack, however, a clear perspective with which they could defend their interests against the banks and big corporations. "It is becoming ever clearer: a new political perspective is needed, which proceeds from an entirely different basis than the current political establishment. This is the perspective we want to discuss today."

Vandreier then introduced the leading candidate and

chairman of the PSG, Ulrich Rippert, who began his remarks by comparing today's situation with that of 20 years earlier with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the East European Stalinist regimes. "Who at that time—in the spring of 1989—would have thought that the world would look completely different just a few months later?"

"We are once again going through a period of fundamental social change," Rippert said, "Once again history is in motion. And this time it is important to be prepared—unlike 20 years ago when the events of that time came to the large majority of the population in East and Western Europe as a surprise. This time it is necessary to be able to look ahead and consciously intervene in social developments."

Rippert stressed that the real strength of a party depended on whether it was able to understand social developments in their historical context and develop a viable perspective. While a broad range of political tendencies celebrated the toppling of the Stalinist regimes twenty years ago as the triumph of capitalism, the Trotskyist world movement pointed out that the collapse of Stalinism was merely the initial stage in a historical crisis of world capitalism, which is so evident today.

In response to all those parties and trade unions, which sought to represent the crisis as the result of mistaken policies and unchecked excesses, Rippert stressed that the economic collapse was the expression of the historical crisis of capitalism. "The crisis is not an abnormality, not an accidental breakdown in an otherwise viable system, but rather the inevitable result of its historical decline. The crisis is the inevitable expression of the bankruptcy of the entire capitalist social system."

The ruling elite reacts to this crisis with intensified

attacks on the working class and increasing conflicts with its imperialist rivals. The class character of this ruling elite is now very clear, as one could see from the example of Jens Peter Neumann. Despite playing a major role in the loss of billions by the financial institution for which he worked—Dresdner Bank—the sacked Neumann is insisting he receives enormous bonus payments and compensation. Such arrogance on the part of the financial elite will inevitably lead to violent social conflicts, Rippert said.

The PSG candidate then presented the party's program in the form of three fundamental political principles. First of all, he explained, the PSG is an international party, which unites workers across all borders in the struggle against exploitation and war. Secondly, the PSG sought the abolition of capitalism and the democratic control of the means of production. Working people had to intervene into political events as an independent social force and assume responsibility for the democratic control of the banks and all important enterprises. Thirdly, the PSG fights for the political independence of the working class. This requires above all a conscious break with the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Left Party and the trade union bureaucracies and the building of the PSG as the mass party of the working class.

It was on that basis that the PSG was deliberately running its candidates against such political forces as the Left Party. The ruling elite had cultivated the Left Party in Germany and similar political organizations, he said, to head off an independent political movement of the workers and rescue the bourgeois order. The working class must adopt a stance of conscious political hostility toward such organizations.

Rippert closed his contribution by explaining that the development of the workers' movement had to take an international form. "Globalization introduced a qualitatively new stage of social development in which the working class can act as an international class and build a new society based on genuine solidarity. Our world party and the *World Socialist Web Site* are the instruments to develop this workers' movement on an international socialist basis. I call upon you all to actively participate in this task."

Rippert's contribution was followed by a number of questions and contributions, including exchanges over the role of the Green Party. One participant asked what

conclusions could be drawn from that party's turn to the right. The candidates of the PSG explained that the Greens had been adamantly hostile to scientific socialism and the political independence of the working class from their inception and had limited their activities to radical protest politics within the context of the existing order. Instead of changing the system it was they who had been changed by the system and the party ended up playing a crucial role in enabling the German establishment to send the army into war for the first time since the Second World War.

There was also discussion of the role of the Left Party. Rippert stressed that the Left Party was not an expression of the leftward movement of the population. "On the contrary, this party has its roots in an initiative of the ruling elite to prevent an independent movement by workers." It is only necessary to recall how the Left Party came into being, he said, explaining that the longtime leading Social Democrat Oscar Lafontaine allied himself with the former Stalinist apparatus in East Germany. This was done to stabilize the political system under conditions where the SPD was in rapid decline.

This is why the struggle by the PSG for the political independence of the working class from such so-called "left" organizations is so important. The driving force for the policy of the PSG is not a "broad left alliance", but of arming of the working class with an understanding of the objective logic of developments and the need to build its own revolutionary party.

The meeting ended with a successful collection for the party's election fund, which underscored growing support for the PSG's European election campaign.



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