

Vote for the Socialist Equality Party in the German parliamentary elections

For a socialist answer to the capitalist crisis

18 August 2009

The German parliamentary election of 2009 will be held in the midst of the greatest economic recession since the founding of the German Federal Republic. Millions of workers are threatened with the loss of their jobs and brutal attacks on their standard of living.

At the same time, however, those who caused the crisis are celebrating new levels of wealth and profits. The ruling elite sees the crisis as an opportunity to roll back all the social gains won by the working class over generations of struggle. While workers face a permanent state of economic insecurity, the Deutsche Bank is making record profits and the executives at the companies listed on the DAX stock exchange pocketed an average of €3.8 million last year. In same year, the Wall Street banks, which have received a massive taxpayer-funded bailout—granted management bonuses of \$33 billion.

None of the political parties in the federal parliament is prepared to impose any serious restrictions on the reckless operations of the financial oligarchy, which has brought the world economy to the brink of collapse. That is because of all these parties answer to and are controlled by the massive financial houses and banks.

The Socialist Equality Party—the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG)—has decided to participate in the election and put up our own regional lists of candidates in the states of North Rhine Westphalia and Berlin. The aim of our campaign is to build a new party that enables the working population to intervene independently and in its own interest. It is impossible to solve a single social or political problem without breaking the economic and political grip of the financial oligarchs.

We are putting forward a socialist programme: the needs of society must take priority over the profit interests of the owners of capital, and the levers of the economy—the banks, insurance firms and large-scale industrial concerns—must be transformed into public owned enterprises, controlled democratically by the working class. Decisions affecting the lives of millions cannot be left to the laws of the market and the single-minded drive to enrich the wealthiest 10 percent of society.

We are internationalists. Our response to globalisation is not to fortify national borders and protect the jobs of workers in one country at the expense of others, but rather to unite the international working class. We defend the interests of all workers, irrespective of where they live, their nationality, skin colour or religion.

The mounting economic and social crisis is affecting workers in every country and a social storm is gathering worldwide. We are setting out to politically prepare the working class for the inevitable resurgence of mass social struggles in Germany and throughout the world, and to provide a socialist and internationalist strategy to lead them to victory. Our aim is to build a mass socialist movement to break the power of capital and establish a workers' government, in order to establish genuine democracy and social equality.

We base ourselves on a powerful tradition—on the early years of social democracy, which educated generations of workers in the spirit of Marx and Engels; on Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who opposed the development of opportunism within social democracy and its capitulation at the start of the First World War; on the Left Opposition and Leon Trotsky, who fought against the crimes of Stalinism and founded the Fourth International in 1938; and the struggle by the International Committee of the Fourth International to defend these principles since 1953.

Together with our co-thinkers in the ICFI in Europe, North America, Asia and Australia, we are building a single, international party to unite the working class in the struggle for world socialism.

Our Internet publication, the *World Socialist Web Site*, attracts readers from all over the world, and is increasingly recognised as the authentic voice of Marxism.

The decline of social democracy and the trade unions

At one time, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the trade unions claimed to represent the interests of workers. Today there is no limit to their cowardice and submissiveness, as they collaborate with the banks, employers and the government to destroy the jobs and living standards of the working class.

In its election platform—the “Germany Plan”—Vice-Chancellor and SPD leader Frank-Walter Steinmeier’s has made it clear that the party aims to strengthen German business interests at the expense of workers. The plan states quite openly, “We know that prosperity is based on individual and entrepreneurial freedom.” The SPD expressly rejects what it refers to as a “state based on an egalitarian division of wealth and telling people what to do”—i.e., that the government should strive to promote social equality.

Steinmeier’s “Germany Plan” is a continuation of former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder’s Agenda 2010 programme. During its past 11 years in government, the SPD freed financial markets from regulation, lowered taxation for the rich, deregulated the labour market, created an enormous low-wage sector and reduced the income of the long-term unemployed to a pittance (the Hartz IV scheme). It established all the preconditions for the banks’ orgy of speculation and then, when the bubble burst, handed billions in public funds to them.

Now it wants to force the working class to pay. Just a few weeks before the election, it embedded into the German constitution a “brake on debt accumulation,” that compels future governments to recuperate the billions handed over to the banks by drastically cutting public spending. This constitutional provision will inevitably nullify all promises for social

improvements made in the election as soon as the polling booths close on September 27.

The trade unions and their members on the works councils—closely linked to the SPD—function as management’s most effective weapon for the increase in the exploitation of workers. Typical of this is the conduct of IG Metall and its works council at Opel. For weeks, they have offered to back the sale of GM’s European division to whatever financial shark is ready to assure the interests of the union apparatus. The sacrifice of 12,000 jobs is no problem, so long as the positions and incomes of the IG Metall officials remain secure. This so-called “union” refuses to mobilise workers throughout the car industry to jointly defend their jobs. The principle of solidarity has long since been replaced by the struggle of every individual worksite against all others. The trade union functionaries have become co-managers, who sabotage every joint struggle and are well compensated for betraying the workers they claim to represent.

The most malignant form of this decay is to be found in Oscar Lafontaine’s Left Party. It has transformed the principle, “Talk left-wing, act right-wing” into a party programme. The Left Party loudly complains about “social injustice,” but actively promotes it wherever it assumes a position of power. No other federal state has continually cut back on welfare and public spending more than Berlin, where the Left Party has ruled in coalition with the SPD for eight years. Notwithstanding its occasional use of socialist sounding phrases, the Left Party is a defender of capitalist property relations and offers no alternative to the government’s bank rescue programme.

Various groups calling themselves “socialist”—such as Socialist Alternative (SAV) and marx21— have joined the Left Party. They claim, with their support, it will be possible to build a movement reflecting the interests of the workers. This is fundamentally false. The real role of the Left Party is to suppress the rise of a genuine socialist movement by encouraging illusions in the possibility of reforming capitalism. This can only lead to disappointment and defeat, from which right-wing forces can profit.

The SEP regards the Left Party as a political opponent. Our aim, to build an independent political movement of the working class, can only be realised by breaking with the SPD and the Left Party and leading a rebellion against the trade unions.

The present crisis did not simply appear out of the blue. It is the product of a historically obsolete social system. The same contradictions that plunged humanity into the barbarism of the two world wars and fascism between 1914 and 1945 are breaking to the surface once again. The private ownership of the means of production cannot be reconciled with the modern production process, which binds millions of people together and makes them dependent on each other. The division of the world into competing nation-states is incompatible with the global character of modern production.

Although the stock exchanges are currently celebrating rising share prices, all serious analyses of the situation shows that the full extent of the crisis has yet to come. Leading economic institutes calculate the German economy will shrink by 6 percent this year, while the number of unemployed will increase dramatically. If the “hidden” unemployed are included, then six million people are already out of work today with another two million forced to work short-time or facing an acute threat of joblessness.

Meanwhile, the low-wage sector is expanding rapidly. Some 6.5 million people—more than every fifth employee—is working for an hourly payment under €9.62 in western Germany and €7.18 in eastern Germany. About 1.2 million workers earn less than €5 per hour. The low-wage sector serves as an instrument for the continual reduction of standard wages.

Low wages and mounting unemployment directly affect public budgets. While revenue from taxes decreases, expenditure on the unemployed and short-time workers is increasing. By the end of next year, budget deficits

of €50 billion are expected, due to rising unemployment and health insurance costs. Experts from the Ministry of Finance calculate that the total shortfall in tax revenue for federal, state and municipal governments will amount to €300 billion over the next three years.

In order to recover these enormous sums, as well as the even greater amounts associated with the bank rescue programmes, every future government—regardless of the outcome of the federal election—will seek to enforce drastic austerity, the likes of which have never been seen.

Socialism or barbarism

The SPD, the CDU-CSU Union (Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union), the Greens and even the FDP (Free Democratic Party) swear in unison that they are seeking to revive the “social market economy” of Ludwig Erhard, the CDU post-war minister of economics under Konrad Adenauer. But the post-war economic upturn that made possible improved social conditions under capitalism was only an historical interlude, which cannot be repeated. The postwar boom was based on exceptional circumstances—new opportunities to extend economic activity, owing to the massive destruction of the Second World War; the strength of American capitalism; as well as the suppression of every revolutionary movement of the masses by the Stalinist bureaucracy and the Communist parties under its control. Above all, the wealth of the American bourgeoisie and the weakness of the European bourgeoisie, discredited due to its association with fascism, enabled the official labour movements of the time to win major, but as time has shown, temporary concessions.

Since then, the international situation has undergone a fundamental change. Today, American capitalism is at the centre of the crisis. Pressed by business rivals in Asia and Europe and deeply in debt, it tries to compensate for its economic weakness by exercising its superior military strength. The consequences are the imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the bourgeoisie initiated a worldwide offensive against the working class. Confronted with the globalisation of production and deregulation of financial markets, the nationally based trade unions and reformist parties transformed themselves into servile adjutants of their “own” capitalist classes. Since then, wages and social expenditure have stagnated, while executive compensation has rocketed.

Social inequality has assumed breathtaking dimensions. The wealthiest 10 percent of the German population possesses half of all social assets, while the poorer half owns just 2 percent. Some 2.5 million children and teenagers live on the level of welfare recipients. Every sixth child of the almost 2.5 million children under 15 lives in poverty. Social contradictions are even more glaring in the US.

All inhibitions on the part of the bourgeoisie were dispelled with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the former East German GDR (Stalinist German Democratic Republic) in the early 1990s. Its triumphant money making orgy knew no limits. Banks and hedge funds undertook foolhardy financial operations to rake in extraordinary profits. Bankers and business managers drew salaries, amounting to tens of millions. Now this speculative bubble has burst. The true face of capitalism is there for all to see. What was once glibly described as the “open” or “social economy” is now exposed as the crass dictatorship of finance capital.

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the global crisis of capitalism has destroyed the myth that socialism failed and, therefore, there was no alternative to capitalism. It was not socialism that failed in the USSR and the GDR but the despotic attempt of a privileged bureaucracy to establish the semblance of a socialist society within

national boundaries. Genuine communists were persecuted by the Stalinist bureaucracy and, in the Moscow show trials of 1937-1938, murdered on a massive scale. There was no democracy for workers. Yet, workers' democracy and the cooperation of the world's producers, based on the utilization of the highest developments in science and technology, is the precondition for genuine socialism.

The devastating crisis in Eastern Europe has now made clear that the introduction of capitalism represented a colossal step backwards. A small elite, consisting of nouveau riche and former Stalinists, expropriated social property and now basks in wealth, while broad layers of the population are condemned to misery.

As is well known, on the eve of the French revolution the feudal aristocracy was unwilling to give up its wealth and privileges. The financial aristocracy is behaving in a similar manner today. It reacts to the crisis by intensifying its attacks on the working population and escalating its conflicts with international rivals. Everywhere there is a growing trend towards militarism and the building up the repressive apparatus of the state.

As was the case in the first half of the last century the crisis of capitalism confronts mankind with the alternative: socialism or barbarism. Not a single social or political problem can be solved without breaking the grip of finance capital. The crisis cannot be overcome by patching up capitalism. What is necessary is a social transformation and the building of a socialist society.

What we stand for:

For the political independence of the working class

A socialist transformation presupposes that the mass of the population consciously intervenes in political life. The PSG aims to establish the political conditions and programmatic basis for precisely such an intervention.

We support all initiatives—strikes, factory occupations and mass demonstrations—that strengthen the self-confidence of workers and challenge the autocratic power of the parasites in the political establishment and big business. Such struggles can be successful, however, only if they are conducted independently of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the trade unions. The leadership of these struggles cannot be left to the bureaucratic apparatuses. Instead, independent, democratically elected strike committees and workers councils must be developed, which are elected by rank and file workers and directly answerable to the working class.

The economic crisis heralds a new epoch of international class battles. Increasingly, workers and young people can see that a struggle for their rights and interests is unavoidable. The official ideology, which states there is no alternative to the free market economy, has suffered a heavy blow as a result of the crisis. There have already been violent social confrontations in many European countries.

We aim to develop a party that bases itself on the strategic experiences of the international socialist movement. Without understanding the causes of the victories and the defeats of the workers' movement in the 20th Century—the German disaster of 1933, when the rightwing policy of the SPD and the ultra-left course of the KPD opened the road for Hitler's victory—it is impossible to develop a serious revolutionary orientation today. These experiences are embodied in the Fourth International and the Left Opposition, which took up the struggle against Stalinism in 1923 under the leadership of Leon Trotsky. Since then the Trotskyist movement has conducted an indefatigable struggle for the defence of Marxist principles, which are now confirmed by current developments.

For the socialist transformation of society

Modern, global productive forces provide all the material conditions for overcoming poverty and backwardness all over the world and significantly raising mankind's living standard and cultural level. This presupposes, however, that these productive forces are placed at the service of the whole of society and are released from the fetters of capitalist private ownership and the nation state.

This requires the establishment of workers governments committed to the interests of the working people rather than those of big business. Only such governments will be able to undertake the radical economic measures necessary to overcome the crisis.

Work, education, the care of the elderly and sick are basic social rights. A state guaranteed pension, enabling all senior citizens to live out their lives in comfort, a comprehensive, publicly financed health care system as well as free education up to university level must be guaranteed for all.

The politicians and media pundits claim there is not enough money and reject the expansion of social provisions out of hand. When it came to rescuing the banks, however, the government found hundreds of billions of euro within the space of a few days. The means are present. They are, however, monopolized in the hands of a few and grossly unequally distributed.

In order to finance an ambitious program of public works and a comprehensive program to meet the needs of society it is necessary to transform the central foundations of the economy—the banks, insurance companies and large industrial trusts—into social property under genuine democratic control. Small and medium-size enterprises, struggling for survival must have access to affordable loans enabling them to guarantee the jobs and incomes of their workforces. High incomes and incomes derived from the possession of capital and wealth must be heavily taxed in order to finance necessary social expenditure.

A workers' government would be much more democratic than today's governments. It would rest upon the active support of a politically conscious population, which would be directly engaged in decision-making and policy execution. Under a bourgeois government, on the other hand, even the existing democratic mechanisms are becoming a pure facade. Decisions concerning the handing over of billions to the banks are made by a tiny handful of individuals. The population is robbed of any possibility of influencing social developments.

For the international unity of the working class

The international working class has enormous social power. The economic changes of the last decades mean that the social weight of the working class has grown massively across the world. Innovative developments in the area of information and communications technology have led to an unprecedented integration of the world economy. Production and trade link together millions of people around the globe, who are dependent upon one another. Tens of millions of workers in the so-called developing countries are joining the army of wage earners. Countries like China and India, which were largely agrarian a short while ago, rank today among the most important industrial regions of the world. The percentage of mankind living in cities is higher than ever before, and these masses are directly integrated into the global production process.

While the bourgeoisie is internationally organized and seeks to use the

global division of labour to exploit workers in low-wage regions, the working class lacks an international strategy to defend its jobs and living standards. The trade unions strive to split the international working class by limiting their struggles to the framework of national states, playing off one factory against another, and stirring up protectionism and nationalism.

As a section of the Fourth International, the PSG fights for the international unity of the working class. In order to meet the attacks undertaken by the global corporations, workers must unite worldwide. We are decisively opposed to all attempts to drive a wedge between German and foreign workers inside the country or to instigate German workers against their colleagues in Eastern Europe or Asia.

For the United Socialist States of Europe

The institutions of the European Union, including the European parliament, increasingly function openly as the lackeys of the European great powers and the most influential sections of big business. The European governments use the EU to shift the burden of the financial and economic crisis onto the backs of the population. This is facilitated by the competition regulations emanating from Brussels, the systematic dismantling of democratic rights and the establishment of a European police state. The European Commission is synonymous with deregulation, liberalisation and the destruction of workers' rights.

The PSG rejects the European Union, its institutions and its planned constitution. We do so from the standpoint of international socialism, not nationalism. The progressive unification of Europe is possible only on a socialist basis. The progressive unification of Europe is only possible on a socialist basis. The overcoming of national borders combined with the utilisation of the continent's technical and cultural resources would provide the basis for overcoming poverty and backwardness and elevate living standards throughout Europe.

For the defence of democratic rights

The defence of social achievements is inseparably bound up with the defence of democratic rights. The PSG opposes the dismantling of basic democratic rights, which is taking place ever more rapidly under the pretext of countering "terrorism." The ruling elite and its political representatives are seeking to destroy elementary democratic rights in preparation for coming class struggles. Over a hundred laws have been amended in the context of a series of anti-terror packages. The powers of the security forces—secret services, police, federal border police—have been expanded and their budgets increased. Broad layers of the population are subjected to routine supervision by dragnets, on-line monitoring and limits placed on data protection.

Workplace democracy is excluded as long as social wealth remains concentrated in just a few hands, the press and media remain under the control of the big corporations, and education and culture are the privilege of a tiny elite. Under these conditions, there can be no talk of any real democracy. The cuts being carried out in the spheres of culture and arts education are causing immeasurable damage to society, and there is an incontestable link between the glorification of militarism, nationalism, brutality and egotism and the rejection of the artistic and cultural inheritance of earlier times.

For the rights of refugees and immigrants

The inhuman attacks on refugees and immigrants are a spearhead for the destruction of democratic rights for all. Thousands die annually attempting to cross the borders into Europe. Detention without a court order pending deportation, internment camps, the tearing apart of families and the lack of political and social rights are part of everyday life for refugees in Europe.

European workers cannot defend their own democratic rights without defending those of the millions of refugees and immigrants who live on the continent. The witch hunting of immigrants serves to divide and paralyse the working class. Refugees and immigrants are a significant component of the working class and will play an important role in the coming class battles.

Against militarism and war

The economic crisis has not only intensified social contradictions in every country but also led to an escalation of international conflicts. In the course of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan fierce conflicts have broken out over control of the strategically central, oil-rich regions of the earth. And although the German army was responsible for drowning the world in blood on two occasions in the past century, the German army is once again fighting on the front line to defend the interests of the economic elite.

With the escalation of the Afghanistan deployment, German foreign policy is not only resorting to increasingly brutal measures, the military high command is also reasserting itself as an independent political factor. The decision to use mortars and tanks against insurgents for the first time since the Second World War was made by the German army high command without consulting the Bundestag. Such decisions lie in the hand of the generals, declared German army general Wolfgang Schneiderhan.

With its military deployment in Afghanistan, the German bourgeoisie is pursuing imperialist interests, such as the protection of its power supply. This inevitably leads to conflicts with Germany's provisional allies. As financial and economic problems grow, the self-interests of each nationally based clique of capitalists is what predominates in London, Paris and Berlin. All-embracing protectionism is a preliminary stage to economic wars and eventually military conflicts between the great powers.

The struggle against war cannot be separated from the social question, i.e., from a fight against the roots of militarism in the capitalist system. War cannot be stopped with moral indignation. The example of the Greens clearly showed how quickly such pacifism is transformed into its opposite under conditions of aggravating international conflicts.

Workers must develop their own joint international answer to the drive towards war. We demand the immediate closure of all US-bases on German soil, the dissolution of NATO and the withdrawal of all foreign, in particular German troops, from the Balkans, the Middle East, Afghanistan and Africa.

Vote for the Socialist Equality Party

Vote for the Socialist Equality Party on September 27 to demonstrate

your support for this program. Take part in our activities and read our daily website: www.wsws.org/de. More information about our election campaign is available under: www.gleichheit.de



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