Germany: SEP begins crucial phase of federal election campaign

Our correspondents
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The German Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG) began its so-called “hot phase” of the federal election campaign this weekend. Street campaigning is well underway with information stands in front of shopping centres, at universities and outside workplaces. Reporters from the major German ARD state television station have interviewed PSG candidates and election meetings have been organised.

Addressing party members and campaign volunteers, party chairman Ulrich Rippert explained the significance of the PSG’s participation in the election and the general aims of its campaign. At the heart of the campaign is the objective of building a new party that enables the working population to intervene in the political process independently from the established parties. Rippert pointed out that, as far as the incumbent parliamentary parties were concerned, there was no genuine election campaign currently underway. He went on to explain the reason for the “political calm”, characterising the official campaign: no party dares to speak about the real issues, preoccupying and anguishing millions of people.

Their concern about the imminent slashing of social spending is met with an icy silence in the election campaign. “The grand coalition has only recently embedded into the German constitution a 'brake on debt accumulation' that compels all future governments to dismantle the soaring budget deficit by implementing ruthless austerity measures," said Rippert. "The billions of euro allocated to the banks, the falling tax revenues and increasing burdens on welfare budgets are to be recuperated from the weakest layers of society. But there’s not a word about this in the election campaign.”

Instead, vague promises about increased spending on education, social improvements and reduced taxes are made, although everyone knows these kinds of promises will be dumped immediately after the election. The official election is part of a conspiracy against the population.

The PSG has issued a detailed election manifesto that currently is being widely distributed and has been translated into English, Turkish and French. The manifesto explains the significance of the election in relation to the economic crisis and the accompanying attacks on the working class.

While millions of workers are confronted with loss of employment, drastic reductions in wages and the dismantling of social benefits, the organisations that once claimed to represent the interests of workers have completely changed sides. As explained in the PSG election statement: “The SPD (Social Democratic Party) and the trade unions lie prostrate at the feet of the financial oligarchy. There is no limit to their cowardice and submissiveness.”

The manifesto also clarifies the role being played by the Left Party and explains why the PSG strictly refuses to cooperate with “the left”.

“The most malignant form of this decay (of the traditional working class organisations) 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.”

The PSG is focusing its campaign on two of Germany’s major federal states. The first is North Rhine Westphalia (NRW), the country’s most populated state and the one containing the Ruhr region—at one time, Western Europe’s most important industrial centre. At the moment, the battle over the Opel auto company is reaching its climax in the NRW city of Bochum. The second state, where the PSG is fielding candidates, is the capital city of Berlin. The main issue for the PSG there is its principled polemic against the social policies of the Left Party.

The PSG’s four election candidates—Ulrich Rippert (58) and Fabian Reymann (29) in Berlin; Elisabeth Zimmermann (52) and Dietmar Geisenkersting (42) in NRW—are all members of the PSG executive committee with an abundance of political experience.

The PSG’s election posters stand in contrast to the empty and meaningless cartoon captions of the other parties. For example:

“Not a cent for the banks and speculators! Those responsible

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for the crisis must pay! Banks and firms under democratic control of the employees!

"Monthly income in Germany: Porsche boss €4,500,000; average net wage €1,470; Hartz IV (unemployment support) €351; €1,500 basic income for all! Tax the top bracket 100%!—€20,000 a month is enough!

"Hartz IV light, Bank Rescue Packages, Social Cutbacks ... The Left Party wants to rescue capitalism. We don't!"

All of these posters can be downloaded in PDF format from our Web site.

The PSG has also produced a 90-second spot that will be broadcast on state television stations. This summarises the PSG's main election statements. Among other things, it declares, "We support strikes and workplace occupations for the defence of all jobs. Major banks and business concerns must be expropriated and placed under the democratic control of the population. Instead of giving away billions of euro to the banks, millions of well paid jobs must be created together with high-quality, free education and job training for everyone. The German military must withdraw from Afghanistan, Somalia and all other countries."

Last Thursday, PSG candidates were interviewed by the ARD television network. ARD wanted to shoot outdoor film sequences and asked all parties, not represented in parliament, to take part in filming two significant outdoor scenes and accompany these with a commentary. The PSG led the TV team to a huge construction site in Berlin, and Ulrich Rippert provided the shoot with the following words:

"Every day I come past this construction site, and I'm always astounded at the precision and speed workers can put up such towering and complex buildings these days. Labour productivity has increased more than three-fold over the last 50 years. That means a worker can today produce about three and a half times as much as in the same time in 1960. And that's not only the case for Germany. On this construction site, the workers speak various languages. Millions of workers throughout the whole world are closely connected to one another in the globalised production process. If their skills were combined and used in a systematic way, all of the major problems currently plaguing humanity could be solved. Instead, poverty and unemployment are on the increase. Every day 30,000 people die from malnutrition."

The second film was made on the eastern side of the city in front of the shut-down Samsung works in Oberschöneweide. Executive committee member Chistoph Vandreier provided the following commentary:

"Here you can see the other face of capitalism—industrial ruins. Value, created by labour, increases the profits of speculators. At the same time, companies are closed down, wages stagnate and social and welfare services are demolished. The only things that grow are managers' salaries and stock market profits. We are preparing the way for a social movement from below that will break the stranglehold of capital. The requirements of society must have priority over the interests of profit makers. Decisions affecting the lives of millions cannot be left to the laws of the market."

This film will be shown as part of the so-called "Outsider Round" after the ARD news broadcast four days before the election on September 23.

The PSG has launched a new federal parliament election Web site. It is possible to register there as a campaign volunteer and to participate in campaign activities. Such activities include, for example: "Task 1: Help to get 5,000 hits for the PSG's promotional slot on television!"

The new election Web site focuses on networking facilities. Supporters can contribute to various social networks like Facebook, MySpace or StudiVZ. They can use these groups to discuss and exchange ideas among themselves. The site will regularly inform them about the election campaign. It is also possible to register for a newsletter so that information can be conveniently received via email.

Apart from the newsletter, there will also be audio and video clips, in which PSG candidates respond to current developments and take up questions from readers and viewers. The first video clip is the PSG's election film that will also be broadcast on state television.

Questions can be sent via the Web site to the PSG or to particular candidates.

The PSG greatly values the opportunity to discuss issues with the electorate. It has already made preparations to conduct half a dozen discussion events in various towns and cities, including Bochum, Frankurt/Main, Munich, Leipzig, Hamburg and Bielefeld. The times and venues for these meetings can be found on the election Web site. Flyers can also be found there, enabling the visitor to easily inform friends about the events and invite them along. The event closing the election campaign will be held in Berlin on September 26.

As the parliamentary election campaign and the building of the PSG is an expensive undertaking, much needed donations can also be made via the election Web site.

The editorial staff of the World Socialist Web Site appeals to all its readers to take an active part in supporting the PSG's election campaign.

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