

Public meeting in Leipzig, Germany

Twenty years since the fall of the wall—from Stalinism to capitalism

20 November 2009

Hardly any other event in recent history has been so mystified as the fall of the Berlin Wall 20 years ago. It put an end to the dictatorship of the Stalinist Socialist Unity Party (SED), only to replace it with a new form of dictatorship: the dictatorship of capital.

Without being consulted, or playing a role in the process, the life of the east German population has changed dramatically. The trust set up by west German politicians and business interests privatised or closed 14,000 state-owned enterprises in east Germany. Within the space of three years, 71 percent of all employees either lost their jobs or were forced to change them. The consequences are still being felt today. In the former East German states, the number of unemployed is far greater than in the west of the country, while average wages are much lower. Fifty percent of those with jobs in East Germany earn less than €9.20 per hour (gross).

Prior to the fall of the wall, hundreds of thousands had taken to the streets in the GDR (German Democratic Republic, East Germany) to protest against the ruling bureaucracy and the deterioration of the economic situation. The demands raised by demonstrators were entirely justified, but they lacked any clear goal or comprehension of the social tasks they confronted, making it easy for them to be manipulated and misused.

The SED maintained the initiative and played the leading role in laying down the course for the introduction of capitalism. Hans Modrow, the last SED prime minister of the GDR, later wrote in his memoirs that “the course toward a unified Germany is irreversibly necessary” and that he “had decisively taken that course.” He was supported in this respect by

the democratic rights movement, which sat down with him at the round table and eventually joined him in government.

The SED was not socialist, but rather a Stalinist organisation. Its power base was not the working class, but rather a privileged caste, which had assumed power in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Under the leadership of Stalin this caste undertook to suppress and liquidate the Marxist opposition. The Stalinist bureaucracy based itself on the nationalised forms of property introduced following the Russian Revolution—but it did so in the manner of a parasite, which feeds off its host and eventually destroys it.

The Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (BSA), the predecessor of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party of Germany), was the only organisation in 1989 to warn of the consequences of the introduction of capitalism. It was the only political movement that put forward a programme opposing Stalinism on the basis of an international socialist perspective. As the German section of the Fourth International, it stood in the tradition of the Trotskyist movement, which had fought Stalinism since 1923 from a Marxist standpoint.

The warnings made by the BSA at that time, that the introduction of capitalism in the GDR, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union would end in social disaster and a new period of imperialist wars, has been fully confirmed.

Twenty years after the fall of the wall, the world is marked by increasing conflicts between the great powers, the escalating wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, nonstop attacks on the social gains of the working class and the arrogance and greed of the financial elite.

These contradictions will inevitably lead to the

outbreak of violent social conflicts and revolutionary struggles. It is necessary to politically prepare for such struggles, and in this respect it is vital to draw the lessons from the events of 1989.

The PSG is holding a public meeting in Leipzig on November 29 to draw out and discuss these lessons. The introductory report will be given by Peter Schwarz, the secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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Sunday, November 29, 2009, 15:00

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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