German Socialist Equality Party holds meeting on 20 years since fall of Berlin Wall

Our correspondent
10 December 2009

On November 29, the German Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG) held a well-attended meeting in Leipzig entitled "20 Years Since the Fall of the Wall: From Stalinism to Capitalism."

The meeting took place in the historic Alte Nikolaischule opposite the Leipzig Nikolaikirche. The Alte Nikolaischule was founded as a liberal center of learning in 1512, and among its famous students were the philosopher and scientist Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the composer Richard Wagner, and the revolutionary social democrat Karl Liebknecht.

In 1989, it was the site of the so-called "Monday demonstrations," when tens of thousands of East German citizens assembled to protest against social injustice, government incompetence and state repression under the Stalinist German Democratic Republic (GDR) regime.

Christoph Vandreier introduced the meeting by referring to the current social situation, reflected in a number of opinion polls. One poll conducted by the BBC revealed that twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, 89 percent of those questioned around the world were of the opinion that the capitalist system was dysfunctional.

Polls amongst East Germans revealed that 23 percent regarded themselves as worse off since the fall of the Wall. A further 30 percent noted some improvements in their personal lives, but were alarmed by the prevalence of social problems.

The dismantling of past social gains and the increasing economic polarization of society, together with the growth of militarism, are characteristic not only of Germany, but the capitalist system as a whole, Vandreier said.

The next speaker was Peter Schwarz, a member of the PSG central committee and of the *World Socialist Web Site* international editorial board, who addressed the question of whether it was correct to refer to the events of Autumn 1989 as a revolution. His remarks are published separately (see "Twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall").

The final speaker, Wolfgang Weber, reviewed a number of historical issues, including the question of how a state armed with the GDR's powerful repressive apparatus could collapse virtually overnight. In addition to dealing with economic issues, he stressed the significance of preceding developments in the Soviet Union.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was directly bound up with the decision by the leadership of the Soviet Union to abandon the GDR, following the opening up of Hungary's borders in May 1989. Workers at the time lacked an independent perspective. Weber reminded the audience that the International Committee of the Fourth International and the forerunner of the PSG, the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (Socialist Labor League), had already in 1985 analyzed and warned against the pro-capitalist policy adopted by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Weber noted that Gorbachev, who was born into a farmer's family and went on to study law in Moscow, made his early career in the Stalinist youth organization, Komsomol. He was of a generation that was educated during the regime of Stalin, and therefore entirely closed off from the tradition of revolutionary Marxism.

He learned at an early stage in his political career how to carry out Stalinist policies, using various organizational means. He was a Stalinist functionary from the upper-middle class, who in the 1980s presided over a policy of opening up the Soviet Union to the imperialist states of the West and enabling a section of

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the Stalinist bureaucracy to become a new capitalist class in Russia.

He bore political responsibility for the social disaster that accompanied capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union and the Stalinist states of Eastern Europe. The Stalinist bureaucracy fulfilled Trotsky's characterization of it as the grave digger of the October Revolution.

A lively discussion followed the two lectures, with a number of questions posed regarding the history of the Trotskyist movement and whether there could have been a different outcome to the events of 1989.

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