

The way forward for a defense of education in Germany

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Nationwide demonstrations to defend education are planned for June 9 in Germany. The protests are taking place as part of the “Education Strike” campaign, whose organizers are spreading the illusion that it is possible to achieve concessions by putting pressure on the government.

In June 2009, about 270,000 pupils and students took to the streets to express their dissatisfaction with the so-called Bologna process. The initiative was introduced in 1999 by the SPD-Green federal government, drawn up by the European Union authorities in order to establish free-market criteria in the realm of education, thereby transforming the education process into a commodity.

Since this time, nothing has improved. On the contrary, the situation has only worsened in schools and universities, as in all other social sectors in the wake of the recessionary crisis.

In the midst of the greatest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, all the supposedly “left” parties stand on the side of the government and banks. Insisting there is “no alternative” to the attacks being made on the population, they are imposing these attacks themselves. In Germany, the Left Party has helped the government pump hundreds of billions into the banks by agreeing on four occasions to expedited parliamentary proceedings. Now these funds are to be recouped through draconian austerity measures.

A movement able to oppose the attacks must be independent of the old bureaucracies of the trade unions and social democratic parties, which serve during the crisis to enforce these attacks. As in Greece, sections of the financial aristocracy in Germany think that the Social Democratic Party (SPD) should be reintegrated into government, since it is better placed to organize the social cutbacks thanks to its close links with the

unions.

In the past, it was mainly the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party that pushed through the most vicious attacks against workers and students. The SPD-Green government introduced the welfare and labour “reforms” contained in the Hartz IV legislation and Agenda 2010 policies, driving broad layers of society into poverty and despair. At the same time, big business and the rich enjoyed tax breaks, with the top tax rate falling from 53 to 42 percent, and the banks were deregulated.

In education, the SPD and the Greens introduced the Bologna process in 1999, which is synonymous with the transformation of education into a commodity. As well as bringing in bachelor’s and master’s degree courses, and introducing so-called education credits, it heralded the gradual introduction of tuition fees.

The record of the Left Party on education is even worse than that of the SPD and the Greens. Together with the SPD in the Berlin Senate (city government), the Left Party has helped to organise an unparalleled orgy of cuts. The Left Party and the SPD have imposed cuts of €75 million at Berlin’s universities, which has meant abolishing 216 professorships (nearly one quarter of the total), with almost 500 other employees laid off, entire academic departments closed, and the elimination of places for 10,000 students.

Students must vigorously oppose attempts by representatives of these parties to take the lead at the demonstrations. To put it plainly: the Linke.SDS (Left Party Student Organisation), the Jusos (Young Socialists), the Green Youth and the parties they are aligned to are responsible for the misery in education and do not belong in the demonstrations. They are imposing the social cuts and stand on the side of the banks, management and the speculators.

Students can only fend off the attacks if they break once and for all with these political hypocrites and view themselves as part of the international working class.

Throughout Europe and across the world, these “left” parties are helping to recoup the billions pumped into the banks from working people. Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Britain and France have already adopted drastic austerity measures, such as 30 percent wage cuts, cuts in pensions and increases in VAT (sales tax). Germany too now faces the same brutal cuts. The constitutionally enshrined “debt brake” requires savings of €10 billion each year.

Everywhere, resistance is growing against these cuts. In Greece, there have been three general strikes against the austerity measures imposed by the EU, in each case involving more than 1 million people and completely paralyzing the country. The day before the vote on the Greek austerity measures, in Athens alone more than 200,000 people took to the streets. But despite this massive protest, the austerity package was rammed through parliament by the social-democratic PASOK government of Prime Minister George Papandreou.

These cuts can only be enforced because the unions and petty-bourgeois parties like the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and SYRIZA do everything in their power to prevent an independent movement of workers. They supported the election of Papandreou, and following the introduction of his austerity measures they are now stirring up nationalism, isolating strikes and preventing a common protest against the attacks by all workers.

Workers and students must not allow themselves to be divided and played off against one another. The defence of the fundamental right to education is a class question. Education can only be defended if students regard themselves as part of a wider struggle against the cuts, which are now faced by all areas of society. This struggle must be waged on the basis of an international socialist perspective.

Not a single social achievement, including the fundamental right to education, can be defended today without the overthrow of capitalism, breaking the power of the banks and big business, and placing them under the democratic control of the population.

An education system that is oriented to the needs of people and the personal development of every individual can only be established if it is freed from the market and controlled democratically. A

comprehensive and free education system is thus closely linked with the struggle for the socialist transformation of society.

To achieve this goal it is necessary to build a new Marxist workers’ party, which draws upon the lessons of the struggles against Stalinism and social democracy. Only a party that stands on a firm scientific basis is in a position to formulate the tasks that confront the working class, and to enable it to intervene as a conscious and independent force in the development of a society that is geared to the needs of the people and not the profit motives of a narrow elite.

As the student organization of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party, PSG), the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) will organise meetings in the coming days to discuss this perspective with all those who are interested. The exact dates will be announced next week on our web site.



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