

# The Historical Foundations of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit

## Part 11

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*The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) of Germany held its Founding Congress May 22-24, 2010 in Berlin. The Congress adopted the document “The Historical Foundations of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit” on May 23.*

*We are publishing the document in serialized form. Below is the eleventh and final part.*

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### XXVI. The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit and the WSWS

225. The International Committee concluded from the bankruptcy of the reformist organisations that the previous organisational form of its sections as “Leagues” or “Bund” was no longer appropriate. This form had been selected at a time when many militant workers actively supported the social-democratic or Stalinist mass parties and trade unions. The political activity of the sections of the ICFI “therefore assumed, despite variations in tactics, that the starting point of a great new revolutionary reorientation of the working class would proceed in the form of a radicalisation among the most class-conscious and politically-active elements within the ranks of these organisations. Out of that movement, in which the sections of the International Committee would play a catalytic role as the most intransigent opponents of Social Democracy and Stalinism, would arise the real possibilities for the establishment of a mass revolutionary party”, David North explained. That was no longer the case. “If there is to be leadership given to the working class, it must be provided by our party. If a new road is to be opened for the masses of working people, it must be opened by our organisation. The problem of the leadership cannot be resolved on the basis of a clever tactic. We cannot resolve the crisis of working class leadership by ‘demanding’ that others provide that leadership. If there is to be a new party, then we must build it.” Every section of the International Committee began preparations for the establishment of such parties. 130

226. On March 20, 1997, a national conference of the BSA near Darmstadt founded the *Partei für Soziale Gleichheit*. The conference resolution explained: “In the post-war period the SPD and the trade unions still combined a bourgeois programme—the defence of private property—with the defence of social reforms. This enabled workers to secure their daily needs through these organisations, even if their politics ran contrary to workers’ long-term interests.... Today the SPD and the trade unions openly oppose the workers, even in the defence of their daily

needs. Both their members and voters desert them in droves. The defence of even the most minimal demand places before workers tasks that can only be resolved through the building of a new party. Such a party cannot emerge from the rubble of the old, politically bankrupt organisations. It can develop only by assembling the most politically advanced workers around the historically developed programme of the Fourth International. That is why the BSA has seized the initiative to create this party. It places the working class in the position to raise its own voice and intervene as an independent force in social events.” 131

227. The name *Partei für Soziale Gleichheit* was selected on the basis of careful consideration. It expressed “the fundamental objective of the new party: it is in irreconcilable opposition to the prevailing social tendency, which is characterised by the increasing impoverishment of broad social layers on the one hand, and by the unrestrained enrichment of a small minority on the other. It stands for the goal of the socialist movement: a society in which there are no class differences and which is based on real equality between human beings. And it distinguishes itself from the political crimes, committed by the Stalinists and Social-Democratic bureaucracies, in the name of socialism, which they theoretically falsified.” 132

228. The development of the International Committee into a politically unified world party after the split with the WRP culminated in January 1998 in the establishment of the *World Socialist Web Site*. Epoch-making developments in communications, closely followed by the International Committee, created the technological conditions for the WSWS. The Internet was an extraordinary medium for the spread of revolutionary ideas and for organising revolutionary work. For many decades, the production of newspapers had played a central and crucial role in the structure of the revolutionary movement. Lenin had dedicated a substantial part of his groundbreaking work *What Is to Be Done?* to an explanation of the role of an all-Russian newspaper. The BSA had, since its founding in 1971, published a newspaper—first *Der Funke* and then *Neue Arbeiterpresse*. But their distribution depended on the number of party members available to sell it. The Internet created the conditions to overcome this restriction and to extend the party’s readership.

229. The WSWS was not, however, merely a product of Internet technology. It was based on the same conceptions as the transformation of leagues into parties: the International Committee had to play the key role in the political re-orientation of the working class on the basis of Marxism. The WSWS relied on the entire theoretical capital of the Marxist world movement. As the Editorial Board explained: “The *World Socialist Web Site*, published by the coordinated efforts of ICFI members in Asia, Australia, Europe and North America, takes as its starting point the international character of the class struggle. It assesses political developments in every country from the standpoint of the world crisis of capitalism and the political tasks confronting the international working

class. Flowing from this perspective, it resolutely opposes all forms of chauvinism and national parochialism. We are confident that the WSWS will become an unprecedented tool for the political education and unification of the working class on an international scale. It will help working people of different countries coordinate their struggles against capital, just as the transnational corporations organise their war against labour across national boundaries. It will facilitate discussion between workers of all nations, allowing them to compare their experiences and elaborate a common strategy. The International Committee of the Fourth International intends to use this technology as a tool for the liberation of the working people and oppressed all over the world.”

## **XXVII. The Left Party and the petty-bourgeois ex-lefts**

230. At the end of the 1990s, social-democratic governments returned to office in most European countries. But their rightward course rapidly undermined the dwindling support they had still enjoyed in the working class. In Germany, in the seven years of the Schröder government, the SPD lost more than 200,000 members and suffered heavy defeats in every state election. In France, the Socialist candidate Lionel Jospin, after five years in office as prime minister, received fewer votes at the presidential elections of 2002 than the fascist candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen, while the representatives of the combined middle-class left received 10 percent of the vote. A vast gulf has opened up between the working class and the former reformist parties that various petty-bourgeois and post-Stalinist organisations are trying to fill. These organisations have one thing in common: they are the product of conscious initiatives by representatives of the ruling class; they are not centrist organisations moving towards socialism under the pressure of the masses. Their task consists of strangling from the outset every independent political movement of the working class.

231. For a long time, the Italian party Refounded Communism (*Rifondazione Comunista*) was regarded by all of these organisations in Europe as their role model. In 1991, *Rifondazione* emerged out of a section of the Italian Communist Party and took the entire spectrum of Italian ex-radicals, including the Italian section of the Pabloites, in tow. While it stood with one foot in the camp of extra-parliamentary protest movements, during the 1990s it provided various centre-left bourgeois governments with parliamentary majorities. In 2006, *Rifondazione* entered the centre-left government of Romano Prodi, which proceeded to enact substantial anti-working class spending cuts. This set the seal on their bankruptcy. After just two years, the Prodi government was so hated that it paved the way for the return of Silvio Berlusconi’s right-wing government. In 2008, *Rifondazione* itself failed to get back into parliament and broke apart.

232. In France, the Pabloites prepared their integration into the structures of bourgeois politics by dissolving, in January 2009, the 40-year-old *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (LCR) and creating a new party that dissociated itself expressly from Trotskyism and rejected every link to a revolutionary socialist perspective. This was its reaction to the electoral successes of its presidential candidate, Olivier Besancenot, who, in 2002 and 2007, had received over 1 million votes. The programme of the new Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) does not go beyond advocating the reform of capitalism on the basis of a neo-Keynesian economic policy. The NPA strives for “a leftist coalition” with the Communist Party and the Left Party (a faction that split from the Socialist Party) in order to help the discredited Socialist Party win a new government majority. It provides an important base of support for the trade union bureaucracy, which, for its part, is deeply integrated into the capitalist state.

233. In Germany, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Electoral Alternative for Work and Social Justice (WASG) united in the summer of 2007 to form the Left Party. The Left Party unites two bureaucratic apparatuses under one roof, both of which have decades of experience in patronising and suppressing the working class. The Party of Democratic Socialism is the successor to the Stalinist state party of the GDR. In 1990, under Hans Modrow, it organised German reunification and afterwards, as social tensions deepened, undertook to maintain order in East Germany. The WASG developed in the final phase of the Schröder government. It was created by longstanding bureaucrats from the SPD and trade unions who were alarmed over the decline in the SPD’s membership. The initiative for the fusion of the two organisations stemmed from Oskar Lafontaine, one of the most experienced German bourgeois politicians, who for 40 years had occupied leading positions in government and in the SPD.

234. Petty-bourgeois renegades from the Trotskyist movement—such as the Socialist Alternative (SAV) and Marx21—have amalgamated with the Left Party and claim it to be the starting point for the building of “a fighting mass party with tens of thousands of members”. This is a grotesque deception. At no point does the programme of the Left Party go beyond the framework of bourgeois reforms. It defends capitalist private property and the bourgeois state and expressly placed itself behind the federal government’s bank rescue package, which put billions in public funds at the disposal of the banks. Where the Left Party takes part in government, it bends over backwards to fulfill the dictates of the financial world. In the Berlin Senate, for example, it has been in coalition with the SPD since 2001 and participated in an unparalleled downsizing of the public service. The Left Party’s occasional leftist phrases are exclusively aimed at subordinating any mobilisation against social cutbacks or war to the requirements of German imperialism.

## **XXVIII. The tasks of the PSG**

235. Twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, world capitalism is in deep economic and political crisis. The financial collapse that began in September 2008 with the failure of the US investment bank Lehman Brothers ushered in the deepest world recession since the 1930s and drove numerous states to the edge of bankruptcy. This crisis was prepared over decades. Its roots lie in the contradictions of the capitalist system: the contradiction between social production and private ownership of the means of production and the contradiction between the global economy and the national state system. The situation recalls, in many respects, that of a century earlier, the eve of the First World War. At that time, the crisis of world capitalism opened up a 30-year period of violent class conflict and wars, during which relations between the classes and between imperialist powers were forcibly transformed. Likewise, the current crisis is the prelude to a comprehensive reorganisation of economic and social relations that will be no less tempestuous than in the first half of the twentieth century. If the capitalists retain the initiative in resolving the crisis, it will lead to mass poverty, oppression and war. The only alternative is the socialist solution: the seizure of power by the working class, the socialisation and democratic control of the banks and major industries, and development of economic planning that orients to the social needs of the majority, rather than the profit interests of a tiny minority.

236. The dissolution of the Soviet Union was a response to the growing contradictions of world capitalism, and further intensified them. As long as the Soviet Union existed, the imperialist powers felt compelled to suppress social and international tensions. Fearing an expansion of the

October revolution, they granted concessions to the working class, and in the interests of a united front against the Soviet Union, curbed their conflicts of interest and military ambitions. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, that was no longer the case. In January 1991, a military alliance led by the US attacked Iraq. The International Committee emphasised that the war was not an isolated episode: “The as yet incomplete, de-facto partition of Iraq is the beginning of a re-division of the world by imperialism. The former colonies are to be subjugated once again.” It pointed to “the striving by American imperialism to regain its world supremacy”, as being “one of the most explosive elements in world politics“. The increasing belligerence of American imperialism represented “an attempt to reverse its economic decline by the use of military force—the only area in which the United States still maintains undisputed supremacy.” 133

237. This appraisal was confirmed in the ensuing years as US imperialism became increasingly aggressive. In 1999, a US-led military alliance bombed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and forced the separation of Kosovo. This was followed in 2001 by the occupation of Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, a war that has cost more than 1 million lives with several million more turned into refugees. Iran and North Korea are potential targets for American attack. While the pretext for war may vary, the goal remains the same: the subjugation and control of regions of the world that are of strategic importance for the geopolitical and economic interests of the great powers—in particular their energy supplies. American imperialism, confronted with strong rivals in Europe, China, Asia and South America, plays the leading role. But the other imperialist powers participate in these wars in one way or another, partly not to leave the field entirely to the US, partly to pursue their own imperialist interests.

238. After the defeat for Germany in the Second World War, the FRG took its place in the NATO alliance and stood at the head of the confrontation with the Soviet Union. It had a large conscripted army of 500,000 soldiers and permitted the stationing of US nuclear weapons on its territory. Until reunification, however, Germany limited its military activities to defensive operations within the sphere of NATO. From 1990 onwards, it has transformed itself into one of the most important military players worldwide. In 1999, the German army took part in the war against Yugoslavia in a combat mission for the first time. Eleven years later, there are approximately 7,000 German soldiers abroad, more than half of them in Afghanistan. While at first this took place under the pretext of a mission for “peace and security”, the German government now openly refers to the Afghanistan deployment as “war”. In Europe, the old national conflicts are re-emerging. Germany’s refusal to financially support the Greek government, which faces bankruptcy, has turned the other EU members against Berlin and placed the common currency in doubt. Hopes for the peaceful unification of Europe from above are again proving to be a utopia. European “unity” on a capitalist basis means the domination of the most powerful financial interests, the walling-off of its external borders, increasing national tensions and endless attacks on the living conditions of the working class.

239. Pacifist appeals to the ruling class or demands for disarmament cannot halt deepening national tensions, war and militarism. These arise, as Trotsky wrote in 1940 in relation to the Second World War, “inexorably from the contradictions of international capitalist interests”. “The chief cause of war as of all other social evils—unemployment, the high cost of living, fascism, colonial oppression—is the private ownership of the means of production together with the bourgeois state which rests on this foundation.” 134 The fight against war and militarism is inseparably bound up with the building of an international socialist movement of the working class, whose goal is the overthrow of capitalism. The urgently necessary unification of Europe is conceivable

only on a socialist basis, as the United Socialist States of Europe.

240. The Greek debt crisis is the starting point for a new offensive against the European working class. Governments have spent trillions to rescue the banks and now intend to retrieve these enormous sums at the expense of the working class. Under pressure from international speculators and the diktats of the Brussels commission, the Greek social-democratic government has decided on an unprecedented programme of cost cutting. When adjusted to German conditions, the planned budget cuts for the year 2010 correspond to a volume of €100 billion, almost twice as much as the €60 billion that the German government has pledged to save over the next six years, with its so-called debt brake. No other government has succeeded in forcing through such cuts on the basis of democratic methods. Ireland, Latvia and Hungary have decided on similar programmes, and the highly indebted Portugal, Spain, Italy, Hungary and Great Britain are next on the list. Germany and France plan their own draconian cuts to public expenditure.

241. These measures are being carried out despite the fact that social inequality has already reached levels not seen since the 1930s. In 2008, every seventh inhabitant of Germany, one of the richest countries in the world, either lived in poverty or was under threat of poverty—one third more than 10 years ago. Every fourth young adult between the ages of 19 and 25 years, and half of all single parents with small children, lived below the poverty line. At the beginning of 2009, 3.5 million were unemployed. Ever more people work in precarious conditions. Meanwhile, just over half of all jobs carry social security and health care coverage. In Germany, Europe and worldwide, the attempts to reduce living standards even further must lead to a severe sharpening of class war.

242. The susceptibility of the world economy to crisis, the sharpening of geopolitical tensions, the growth of militarism, the undermining of democratic rights, the increase in welfare cuts and unemployment, as well as the alienation of broad layers of the population from the established political organisations, are unfailing signs of an approaching revolutionary crisis. One should not be deceived by the still relatively low level of class struggle that currently prevails. At present, the working class has no voice with which to express its interests. It has been completely abandoned by its traditional political parties, many of which still carry the old political labels “social-democratic”, “socialist” or “communist”, but these designations have long since lost any content. Politically speaking, they hardly differ from the traditional right-wing bourgeois parties, as has been demonstrated by the transformation of the British Labour Party, the Agenda 2010 programme of the German SPD and the cost-cutting programme of the Greek PASOK. Below the surface, the anger of the population is growing. It will break through the existing framework of official politics and come into open conflict with the SPD, the Left Party and the trade unions.

243. The demands of the coming revolutionary epoch can only be met by a party that bases itself on the working class, is led by the most advanced political theory, has drawn the lessons of the past struggles of the international working class and bases its programme on a scientific understanding of the objective tendencies of social development. The International Committee of the Fourth International is the only political tendency whose political work rests on historical principles and is able to present its entire history to the working class. The social democrats, Stalinists, Pabloite tendencies and trade unions do everything they can to avoid examining their past, which is full of blunders and crimes, and to avoid any disturbance of their opportunist manoeuvres by historical principles. The International Committee will win the most determined, courageous and principled elements among workers and youth to its banner.

244. The *Partei für Soziale Gleichheit* will energetically promote the development of new and independent organisations for the working

population and support them in the development of their programme and tactics. The growing social crisis will provoke numerous battles and forms of popular resistance. However, the decisive question remains the building of a new revolutionary leadership. Organising an international socialist movement of the working class, to bring the perspectives and history of Marxism to a new generation of workers and youth is the task of the *Partei für Soziale Gleichheit* and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International.

*Concluded*

NOTES:

130 David North, *The Workers League and the Founding of the Socialist Equality Party*, Detroit 1996, P. 18-19, 30

131 Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, *Grundsätze und Ziele*, Essen 1997, P. 11-12, 129

132 Ibid. P. 5

133 *Against imperialist war and colonialism!* Fourth International, Vol.19 Fall-Winter 1992

134 Leon Trotsky, *Imperialist War And The Proletarian World Revolution*, <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/emergconf/fi-emerg02.htm>



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