The Historical Foundations of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit

Part six

5 October 2010

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 serialised form. Below is the sixth of eleven parts.

Part 1 | Part 2 | Part 3 | Part 4 | Part 5 | Part 6 | Part 7 | Part 8 | Part 9 | Part 10 | Part 11

XV. The counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism after the end of the war

108. The end of the war brought an upturn in the class struggle. Anti-capitalist sentiments were widespread throughout Europe. In Germany, cities and factories lay in ruins. The elite in big business, the state and politics was deeply implicated in the crimes of the Nazi regime, which was responsible for a war of aggression costing 80 million lives, and for committing the greatest genocide in world history. The ruling classes of Italy, France and numerous Eastern European countries had been discredited by their collaboration with the Nazis. A general feeling prevailed that the old social order had failed. The link between Nazi crimes and capitalism was so obvious that it even found expression in conservative party programmes. In 1947, for example, the Ahlen Programme of the CDU advocated the nationalisation of the mines and a planned economy.

109. In this situation, the Soviet regime and its network of Stalinist parties played the crucial role in preventing the working class from seizing power. Stalin feared a socialist revolution in Europe, because it would encourage the Soviet working class and endanger his own despotic regime. At the Yalta and Potsdam conferences, he agreed to the division of Europe, leaving Western Europe under bourgeois rule. The Stalinists used all their political authority to suppress the class struggle. In Eastern Europe, the Kremlin established control over a series of dependent "buffer states" and took over the job of holding the working class in check. In Western Europe, the Stalinist parties threw all their political weight behind the defence of bourgeois rule. In Italy and France, where the communist parties had mass influence, they joined the bourgeois postwar governments led by Marshall Badoglio and General de Gaulle. In Italy, the leader of the PCI, Palmiro Togliatti, assumed the post of justice minister and personally drafted a law for the amnesty of fascists. In Greece, the Soviet bureaucracy refused to provide much-needed support to the rebellious workers and so guaranteed the victory of the bourgeoisie in the civil war.

110. In Germany, out of the cadre of the once largest communist party outside the Soviet Union, only a few had survived the war. Most had fallen victim not to Hitler, but to Stalin. Of several tens of thousands of foreign communists who had lived in the Soviet Union in the mid-thirties, only one in ten escaped the Stalinist purges, according to Leopold Trepper. 62 The most well-known leaders of the KPD in exile in Moscow—including Heinz Neumann, Hermann Remmele and Hugo Eberlein, a close comrade of Rosa Luxemburg and a German delegate to the first congress of the Comintern—were tortured, condemned to death and shot. Ernst Thälmann, who was killed in 1944, had remained in the Nazis' dungeons for 11 long years, although Stalin could have obtained his freedom in 1939 during the Stalin-Hitler Pact. Those who survived had unconditionally subordinated themselves to Stalin or had denounced their comrades. It was they who now led the KPD and (in the case of Herbert Wehner) also the SPD.

111. In its founding document, the KPD professed its support for "the completely unhindered development of free trade and private entrepreneurial initiatives on the basis of private property". The "Ulbricht group", which had returned with the Red Army from exile in Moscow in order to take over the leadership of the KPD, dissolved the spontaneously established anti-fascist and factory committees and replaced them with administrative bodies that included bourgeois forces. "The dissolving of the anti-fascist committees was nothing other than the destruction of the initial beginnings of a perhaps powerful, independent anti-fascist and socialist movement", wrote Wolfgang Leonhard, at that time a member of the "Ulbricht Group". 63

112. The Stalinists' betrayal provided the necessary breathing space for the US to stabilise capitalism in war-ravaged Western Europe. In so doing, the US had two aims: the containment of the Soviet Union and the opening up of new possibilities for the expansion of US capital. After the initial years of crisis, bringing in progressive American production methods, supplying funds under the Marshall Plan and introducing a new international currency system based on the US dollar set into motion a sustained economic recovery. The working class was pacified by a definite improvement in its living standards and the expansion of social and welfare gains. Wages in West Germany rose five times over between 1959 and 1971, with fewer working hours and improved pension and health benefits.

113. The betrayals of Stalinism combined with the marked improvement in working class living standards gave a new lease of life to social democracy and the trade unions. In West Germany, the KPD gradually lost its initial influence—particularly after the repression of the GDR workers' uprising of June 17, 1953. The SPD re-emerged as the leading party of the working class while, at the same time, it moved programmatically further to the right. Kurt Schumacher, who took over the leadership of the party after the war, "drew three conclusions from the

downfall of the Weimar Republic: first, the social democrats must never again allow any doubts to emerge about their patriotism; secondly, they must win over the middle classes, and thirdly, they must draw a clear line between themselves and the German communists dependent on Moscow." 64 In 1959, in Bad Godesberg, the SPD finally bade farewell to any reference to Marxism and the working class. From then on, it designated itself (like the CDU) as a people's party, no longer as a socialist workers' party.

114. The trade unions were re-established after the war under the strict control of the occupying powers. They adapted their rhetoric to the radical mood among the workers; thus, the DGB's founding programme in 1949 called for the nationalisation of key industries and banks and for overall economic planning. But in practice, the unions limited themselves to the demand for *Mitbestimmung* (co-determination), which developed into an institutionalised form of class collaboration. The firm integration of the trade union bureaucracy into the leadership of the large corporations, legally secured by the laws on *Mitbestimmung* and *Betriebsräte* (Works Councils), and their close co-operation with the state, became a permanent component of the "Rhenish model", which rested on "industrial peace" and "social partnership" in order to increase the competitiveness of German industry. When the unions organised labour disputes—like the 1956-57 16-week metalworkers' strike in Schleswig-Holstein that won the right to continued pay in periods of sickness—they made sure that the foundations of capitalism were in no way endangered.

115. In East Germany, as in the rest of Eastern Europe, the Stalinist occupying power initially had no intention of abolishing capitalist property relations, and did so only in certain key areas. Thus, in East Germany, as part of the 1945 campaign to "Place the Junkers' land in peasants' hands", all landed property of over 100 hectares was nationalised without compensation, with the land handed over to more than half a million agricultural workers, evacuees and small farmers. This land reform, which was highly popular, destroyed the material basis of the Junkers, who had formed the backbone of political reaction and the military apparatus in the Wilhelminian empire and the Weimar Republic. Apart from this measure, the Kremlin did not systematically challenge bourgeois property and even allowed bourgeois layers to participate in East European governments with the aim of restraining the working class. Stalin sought to establish a chain of buffer states, dependent on Moscow and forming a protective shield for the Soviet Union, but not necessarily adopting the Soviet Union's model of society. In Germany, Stalin even contemplated for some time the option of a united bourgeois state independent of both the eastern and the western blocs.

116. However, the stabilisation of Western Europe and the onset of the Cold War, with the growing economic, political and military pressure associated with it, put a stop to such plans. From 1948 onwards, the Stalinist bureaucracy came under increasing pressure from two sides. On the one hand, the working class rebelled against the escalating pressures at work and political oppression imposed by Stalin's henchmen in Eastern Europe, in response to the West's strengthening economy. On the other hand, these henchmen oriented themselves increasingly to the West, seeking more independence from Moscow. Moscow reacted by removing the bourgeois elements from Eastern European governments, purging "unreliable" layers from the communist parties, implementing extensive nationalisations and establishing regimes based on the Stalinist model. It was in this context that the German Democratic Republic was founded in the Soviet occupied zone on October 7, 1949.

117. The large-scale nationalisations that followed throughout Eastern Europe were a concession to the working class. The transition of industry and the banks into the hands of the state created the conditions for a planned utilisation of economic resources and guaranteed the masses a relatively high degree of social security. Despite the arbitrary methods of the bureaucracy, the nationalised forms of property yielded considerable returns into the 1970s. By 1953, the production of steel in East Germany was double what it was prior to the Second World War, and in 1969, the GDR, with a population of 17 million, produced more than the prewar German Reich, with its 60 million inhabitants. Between 1950 and 1974, production increased seven times over, although the GDR had considerable disadvantages compared to the FRG, because of the systematic removal of industrial plants to the Soviet Union and because it had no access to Marshall Plan funds and modern American methods of production.

118. The nationalisations were not, however, accompanied by a political strengthening of the working class. Quite the opposite. The Stalinist elite intensified its political repression and economic exploitation of the working class by imposing incentive wages and higher production targets. The result was the first proletarian mass rebellion against Stalinism, which broke out in the GDR on June 17, 1953. The protest by East Berlin construction workers against the lifting of work rates developed, within 24 hours, into a mass strike that was bloodily suppressed by Soviet troops and tanks. More than 100 workers were shot. Hundreds of participants and strike leaders were arrested as "counter-revolutionary agents" and thrown into prison for years. Six strike leaders were condemned to death.

XVI. The division of Germany

119. The division of Germany was an important precondition for both the stabilisation of European capitalism and the maintenance of control over the working class. Fears of an overly powerful Germany had characterised the history of Europe since 1871. Now, the Federal Republic was only half the size of the erstwhile German Reich. A quarter of its territory had gone to the Soviet Union and Poland, and another fifth constituted the GDR. The Federal Republic's population was only slightly higher than that of France, Italy or Great Britain. This was the prerequisite for its integration into an economic alliance with its western neighbours that would finally develop into the European Union. The German working class, with its long Marxist tradition, had been split apart. In the GDR, the SED suppressed any independent political movement from below. In the FRG, the SPD declared its total obeisance to capitalism, exploited the repression of the East German working class in its propaganda and encouraged anti-communism, while at the same time suffocating any attempt at a joint mobilisation of workers in the east and west of the country. In 1953, the SPD prevented any spread of the workers' uprising from East to West Berlin. In 1956, when Soviet troops moved in to crush the Hungarian workers' revolt, and great numbers of West Berlin workers marched in solidarity towards the Brandenburg gate, the former SAP functionary and later German Chancellor Willy Brandt (SPD) personally held them back. With the onset of Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, the SPD leadership developed close links with the SED, while the West German government assisted the GDR regime with billions in credit.

120. The ruling bureaucracy of the GDR was highly conscious of its antagonism to the socialist strivings of the working class. This was reflected in the fact that the GDR was not founded in the name of socialism. Instead, the emphasis was placed on nationalism. Conscious attempts were made to integrate right-wing forces; former members and officers of the NSDAP were given amnesties and permitted to found their own party, the NDPD (National Democratic Party of Germany). The founding manifesto of the parliament of the GDR bore the title "The National Front of democratic Germany" and made no mention of socialism as an aim of state policy. Between 1948 and 1951, the SED expelled from its ranks several tens of thousands of former workers and old communists who had links to the revolutionary past of the KPD and

the working class, as well as former social democrats. They were replaced with faithful party apparatchiks. At the start of the 1950s, the great majority of the SED membership consisted of functionaries from the party, state and industry. It was only after the bureaucracy had secured its dictatorship that the SED announced it would proceed with the "planned establishment of the foundations of socialism in the GDR".

121. However, the GDR lacked the most elementary conditions for the construction of a socialist society: workers' democracy and access to the world economy. If it could not be established "in a single country" in the much bigger Soviet Union, socialism could certainly not be built in the GDR, with its 17 million inhabitants. This fact was not altered by the GDR's economic relations with other Eastern European countries, which remained little developed and subject to bureaucratic arbitrariness. The fundamental problems of the GDR fully emerged as the economic situation gradually began to improve. The construction of a highly developed industrial society required access to the technology and division of labour of the world economy. The bureaucracy sought to resolve this problem by establishing close relations with the FRG. Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* enabled the GDR to acquire Western loans and technology, while West Germany obtained new markets for its products in the east. The GDR's foreign trade with capitalist countries began to grow much more rapidly than its trade with COMECON countries. At the end of the 1970s, 30 percent of GDR trade was with the West, including 10 percent with the FRG. The country increasingly developed into an extended workbench for West European industry, and the result was a definite improvement in living standards. The lack of consumer goods visibly eased. But by utilising the resources of the world economy, the GDR became vulnerable to its fluctuations and crises. It was not able to keep up with the rapid growth in labour productivity augured by computer technology and the globalisation of production. Between 1973 and 1986, the GDR's world share of industrial exports fell from 3.9 to just 0.9 percent, while its dependence on Western loans increased. The economic situation appeared increasingly hopeless.

122. The SED rejected a revolutionary perspective for the West German working class. In the mid-1960s, the party endeavoured to cut off East German workers from the militant struggles and protests carried out by workers and students in the FRG. At the peak of these struggles, in 1968, a deal was reached between East Germany and the West German Justice Ministry to readmit the banned KPD under the new name DKP. The DKP, which remained politically and financially dependent on the East German bureaucracy, bitterly opposed revolutionary movements in West Germany and functioned as a police force for the trade union bureaucracy.

123. Official West German propaganda presented the FRG as an exemplary democratic state. But the Federal Republic was just as little the result of the democratic completion of the bourgeois revolution as the Weimar Republic had been. Its founding was accompanied by the rehabilitation of the old elites, who were needed in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. After the conviction of some prominent Nazis in the Nuremberg trials, legal proceedings against war criminals ceased. Likewise, de-nazification measures in the state apparatus. Business magnates who had been condemned were allowed to keep their fortunes and continue their activities. In the legal apparatus, no one at all was brought to account. In business, the judiciary, the administration, and in the universities of the Federal Republic, one could find numerous former pillars of the Nazi regime.

124. The mass of the population was excluded from direct involvement in the establishment of the new state. There was no elected constituent assembly; the *Grundgesetz* was written by an expert committee and then ratified by the state parliaments. There was no popular vote. The *Grundgesetz* contains numerous restrictions on the sovereignty of the people. The tradition of Prussian authoritarianism was expressed "in restrictions of the lawmakers and of the voters' will that are probably without parallel in any other democratic constitution". 65 Thus, parties can be banned for being unconstitutional and fundamental rights forfeited. Certain *Grundgesetz* articles possess an eternal character and cannot be changed either by the people or by parliament. The core of democracy is defined not as the protection of the citizen from arbitrary state actions, but as the protection of the state from the will of the people. The state embodies "wehrhafte Demokratie" (militant democracy) and is obliged to oppose the will of the people and "to protect majorities from themselves in that it may withdraw certain inalienable values and freedom-securing institutions from their will". 66 This was justified with the thesis of the "collective guilt" of the German people for the crimes of National Socialism.

125. The authoritarian tendencies of the *Grundgesetz* found their sharpest expression in the banning of the KPD in 1956 and the Emergency Laws adopted by the CDU/CSU and SPD in 1968, at the height of the French general strike. The KPD prohibition "was a political decision, arising from the anti-communist state doctrine of the young Federal Republic". 67 After pages of quotes from Marxist classics, the Federal Constitutional Court declared "Marxism-Leninism" to be incompatible with the "free democratic basic order as defined by the *Grundgesetz*". It thereby created a precedent for the ruthless persecution of any political tendency that invokes revolutionary Marxism and fights against capitalism. Approximately 7,000 KPD members received prison sentences, some for several years. In some cases, the courts considered it an aggravating circumstance if the accused had already been locked up in the Third Reich for KPD membership. KPD members were banned from following their profession (*Berufsverbot*) and had their passports withheld; communist students were not permitted to take their university exams. Parents had their child care accreditation revoked because of their political views. Survivors of the war had their legal pension payments cancelled; compensation for those who had suffered injustice under the Nazis was refused, disallowed or had to be paid back. The Emergency Laws, which still apply today, gave the government the power to set aside constitutionally guaranteed basic rights and establish a semi-dictatorial regime.

To be continued

NOTES:

62 Leopold Trepper, *The Great Game*

63 Wolfgang Leonhard, *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder*, Cologne, p397

64 Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen. Zweiter Band. Deutsche Geschichte vom 'Dritten Reich' bis zur Wiedervereinigung*, Munich 2000, p124

65 Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen. Zweiter Band. Deutsche Geschichte vom 'Dritten Reich' bis zur Wiedervereinigung*, Munich 2000, p133

66 Ibid.

67 Christoph Seils, *Geist der NS-Zeit, ZEIT online* 17.8.2006