

The real issues in the “Stuttgart 21” rail project dispute

Socialist Equality Party (Germany)
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The following statement is being distributed at a demonstration being held today against the Stuttgart 21 rail project.

The dispute over the Stuttgart 21 project goes far beyond the question of the construction of a new railway station and what it should look like.

For years, people have seen how an arrogant financial elite, in collaboration with an aloof caste of politicians, has ruled over their heads.

- Schools, public facilities and infrastructure are crumbling as a result of the cuts imposed by the federal, state and municipal governments, while the banks are given billions in public funds to offset their speculative losses.

- Seven million people are living on welfare and 8 million survive on underpaid jobs, while the number of German millionaire households grew by 23 percent to 430,000 in the last year alone.

- German soldiers are fighting and dying in Afghanistan, although there has never been a public debate about it, and the majority of the population oppose the war.

- An ad campaign by the energy lobby was enough—and the federal government cancelled the legally binding agreement on the closure of Germany’s nuclear power plants and extended the lifetime of ailing nuclear reactors. The same applies to the pharmaceutical lobby and the so-called “health care reforms”.

The Stuttgart train station project is the straw that has broken the camel’s back. For months, tens of thousands have been demonstrating against the project every week because they feel ignored and ridiculed. According to credible calculations, Stuttgart 21 will devour more

than €10 billion. Banks, real estate speculators and construction companies are promised great business. The project’s usefulness, however, is more than doubtful.

But what should be done?

The conciliation talks agreed on by the Greens, who are in the leadership of the protest movement, and the Christian Democratic Union will obviously not solve anything. The job of the conciliator, the former CDU General Secretary Heiner Geissler, is to provide a breathing space for the state premier, Stefan Mappus (CDU). According to current polling data, Mappus would lose the state elections in March hands down, also casting Chancellor Merkel into the abyss, since she has tied her fate so closely to the Stuttgart 21 project.

The Greens are playing along because they want to prove to the ruling elite that they can keep a protest movement under control, and because they expect to gain government posts as a result. The *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* said on Thursday that if Geissler succeeds in cooling things down regarding Stuttgart 21, then relations between the CDU and the Greens may also improve again—the conciliation talks might even open the way for a CDU-Green coalition in Germany’s southwest.

It would not be the first time that the Greens have risen to government office on the back of a protest movement, only then to betray their own constituents. In 1998, on a wave of opposition to the Kohl administration, they joined Gerhard Schröder’s Social Democratic Party (SPD)-led federal government; going on to support wars in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, and the welfare “reforms” of Agenda 2010. In 2008 in Hamburg, they sacrificed their most important election promises—the halting of the Moorburg coal-fired power station and the Elbe dredging project—in order to enter a

coalition with the CDU.

The conciliation talks with Geissler will at best provide some cosmetic changes to the building plans and a few extra euros for the protection of the hermit beetle and the planting of some new trees. The talks will not stop Stuttgart 21, and will change nothing regarding the fundamental problem—the dominance of powerful financial interests in every area of social life. In view of the international financial and economic crisis, which is far from over, the attacks on social and democratic rights will increase.

The water cannon and batons used by the police on September 30 against peaceful demonstrators were not a mistake, but a deliberate provocation. They were meant to show the opponents of Stuttgart 21 what awaits them if they do not bow to the dictates of the government. The rule of law must be enforced by legal means, was justification given by state Interior Minister Heribert Rech (CDU) for the police violence.

The conciliation talks do not represent a change of tack for Mappus; he is merely deploying the well-known tactic of the carrot and the stick. And in this, he is relying on the support of the Greens and the SPD. If, despite the talks, resistance to Stuttgart 21 does not diminish, he will inevitably resort to the stick again.

Protest alone will therefore not do the job. To confront the powerful interests behind Stuttgart 21, a broader political perspective is required. The problem is not confined to one railway station project, and also not to Mappus, and not even to Merkel. The real problem is capitalist private property, which gives the large banks and corporations an almost unlimited power over politics and society.

In the era of globalization it is no longer possible to balance social contradictions in the framework of a “social market economy”. Globally active banks and corporations have acquired such a degree of power that it allows them to dictate their conditions to any government. The billion-euro bank rescue package adopted by the federal government in a few hours at the urging of Deutsche Bank CEO Josef Ackermann has shown this clearly.

This cannot be reconciled with democracy, and the same is true for the growing level of social inequality. In political and academic circles discussion has once again turned to the benefits of dictatorial regimes. In the magazine *Internationale Politik*, political scientist

Herfried Münkler compared democracy with a “fussy old aunt, who knows everything, but is no longer able to get things done”. However, there is “a young and powerful nephew, who is ready to help, but sometimes has dictatorial tendencies”, Münkler writes and asks, “Should he be put to his aunt’s aid?”

This is the deeper reason for the arrogance, tyranny and brutality that confronts the opponents of Stuttgart 21. They can be combated only with a perspective that challenges capitalist control over the levers of economic power. The banks and large corporations should be nationalised, placed under democratic control and used for the benefit of the whole of society, not the individual profits of the owners and shareholders. Only on this basis will it be possible to meaningfully plan major infrastructure projects such as the Stuttgart train station with the democratic participation of all stakeholders.

The realization of such a socialist perspective calls for a broad movement of working people. This requires a political break with the Greens, the SPD, the Left Party and the unions, who all defend capitalism.

We appeal especially to younger demonstrators to think about these issues. Read the *World Socialist Web Site*, which analyses the most important international events every day from a socialist standpoint. Make contact with the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG, Socialist Equality Party) and its youth organization, the ISSE (International Students for Social Equality). As the German section of the Fourth International, the PSG stands in the tradition of the Trotskyist Left Opposition to Stalinism.



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