

Support the election campaign of the Socialist Equality Party in Berlin! For a socialist answer to welfare cuts, racism and war!

2 June 2011

The Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG) is participating in the September 18 elections for the Berlin government.

To all those who face increasing attacks at work, welfare cuts and falling incomes, to the unemployed and those forced to rely on Hartz IV welfare benefits, to those stuck in low-paying jobs and those who confront constant harassment from the employment agencies, to young people and students whose education and future opportunities are rapidly deteriorating—we say: build a new political movement that represents your own interests!

The Socialist Equality Party takes a clear position on the side of workers, calling opposed social interests by their name. This sets us apart from all other parties, including the Left Party, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens, who represent the banks and corporations and seek to conceal the interests of their wealthy clientele behind nebulous platitudes.

The PSG is not striving to obtain positions in a bourgeois cabinet and will not participate in any capitalist government. Our campaign is designed to build an alternative to today's conformist politics and party landscape. If elected, our candidates will pursue this goal as members of the city legislature and use their parliamentary positions to inform the population and mobilize for a socialist alternative.

We reject the argument that working people must accept the current economic and political constraints. The claim that there is no alternative to social cuts is the political framework for all of the establishment parties and the trade unions. The Socialist Equality Party sees this as a declaration of bankruptcy on the part of capitalism. A social system that can continue only by destroying the lives of working people has lost its right to exist!

It is not enough to seek reforms and beg for alms. It is necessary to prepare a social transformation which is centred on the expropriation of the large corporations and banks. Only this can create the conditions for democratic control over all major economic decisions.

The Socialist Equality Party, as a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, advocates these fundamental objectives in the Berlin election campaign.

Two political processes that can be observed worldwide are clearly evident in Germany's capital city: a tiny financial elite enriches itself at the expense of the vast majority of the population, and parties that once identified themselves as democratic and on the side of the workers now function wholly in the interests of big business.

For ten years, the SPD-Left Party coalition in the Berlin Senate has been destroying jobs, imposing social cuts and further enriching its wealthy clientele. This has created the conditions for the emergence of right-wing demagogues, including from within the coalition parties themselves, as shown by the example of Thilo Sarrazin, a leading SPD figure who now openly advocates racist and anti-immigrant views.

The record of the SPD-Left Party coalition in Berlin

The SPD-Left Party Senate has deepened the social divide in Berlin. While a small minority lives in the lap of luxury, an army of unemployed, workers in so-called “one-euro” jobs, and other low-wage earners is growing. Vital social services are being destroyed, libraries and schools are being left to rot or simply closed down. The same is true for swimming pools and other sports, cultural and leisure facilities. The Berlin S-Bahn, the citywide urban transit system, is visibly deteriorating.

The SPD-Left Party coalition bows before the banks and employers' associations just like its predecessor under the Christian Democrats Diepgen and Landowsky. As soon as the SPD and Left Party took office in 2001 under Mayor Wowereit, their administration sought an increase of €1.75 billion in the capital of the Bankgesellschaft Berlin, in which the state-owned Landesbank Berlin held a major stake.

A year later, the “risk-shielding law” followed, on the basis of which some €300 million a year was made available to the bank so as to protect the financial assets of the Berlin elite. The finance senator claimed that the Berlin city government would have to find some €6 billion for Bankgesellschaft Berlin. The Senate declared a petition that was circulated opposing this guarantee to be inadmissible.

This generosity towards the rich and the super-rich is but one in a long list of social outrages.

In January 2003, the Berlin Senate left the local government employers' association and then lowered wage levels in the public sector by up to 12 percent. By 2006, some 15,000 jobs had been cut, and by the end of next year another 15,000 will have been axed.

Subsidies to Berlin's three universities have been reduced by €75 million. In 2004, free school textbooks were withdrawn. Teachers' class contact time was increased from 24 to 26 hours a week, while salaries were reduced through the abolition of tenure and other measures. Fees for day care centres were significantly increased.

Wages for new employees in Berlin's public transit system have been slashed by 30 percent. The public transit contract saves the city government €38.5 million in annual staff costs.

In 2003, the Benjamin Franklin and Charité University hospitals were merged, with the aim of saving €20 million annually in expenditures for clinical staff. The incomes of non-medical staff are currently 14 percent below the national average. Staff shortages and ever increasing workloads make providing decent health care impossible.

The SPD-Left Party Senate realized all of these measures with the support of Verdi and the other trade unions, which have collaborated in implementing the cuts and worked to suppress all opposition or limit it to ineffectual gestures. The union officials are in many cases members of the SPD and Left Party.

This experience demonstrates that social gains cannot be defended without breaking with the trade unions and building independent committees of action.

The SPD has lost its credibility and is losing ground in the opinion polls. Now it is encouraging racist and Islamophobic sentiments. That is why it has refused to expel Thilo Sarrazin. The party, which a century ago under August Bebel and Paul Singer proudly defied anti-Semitism, today supports anti-Islamism, which fulfils the same political function. The SPD's decline and rightward trajectory know no bounds.

The Left Party has collaborated closely with the SPD for ten years. It differs from the social democrats only in that its roots lie in the Stalinist East German bureaucracy. On occasion it resorts to left phrases to hide its right-wing politics. The American ambassador, Philip Murphy, reported to Washington that Left Party leader Gregor Gysi had assured him in a confidential conversation, described as "sociable and chatty," that his party's demand for the dissolution of NATO was not meant to be taken seriously. This summed up the cynicism of the Left Party.

The SPD-Left Party coalition has demonstrated before the eyes of millions of people that there are no differences between the establishment parties on fundamental issues. The terms "left" and "right" have little meaning in relation to these parties. The real political divide in society runs between the official political establishment and the mass of the population.

The class politics of the Green Party

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Alliance 90/the Greens) is now seeking to come to power by capitalizing on the misery created by the SPD-Left Party administration. Its strategy follows a clearly discernible pattern.

First, it obscures the deepening social differences, diverting attention from the causes of the crisis in the failure of the capitalist system and the orgy of self-enrichment on the part of the corporate and financial elite. Then, it advocates economic and social policies tailored entirely to the interests of capital.

This is why the Bündnis 90/Die Grünen manifesto begins with long-winded discussions about environmental, identity and cultural politics. It promises "a new political culture," a "policy of diversity," a "city of different sexual identities," "creativity" and a "green industrial revolution." For good measure, it includes calls for "work and social security for all" and "good education for all."

Looking behind the flowery words, however, one finds a hard-line brand of class politics. The Greens are determined to step up the austerity measures begun by Mayor Wowereit and the Senate and to quickly recoup the Berlin city government's €60 billion debt at the expense of workers and the poor. On this issue they are quite concrete. They promise to strictly comply with the constitutionally mandated "debt brake."

As with all other establishment parties, the Greens' promise of "100,000 new, future-proof jobs" really means creating favourable conditions for investment and growth by big business. "We want the world to view Berlin as a business investment and industrial production location," says their manifesto.

It is no secret what arouses the enthusiasm of investors: low wages, tax breaks, subsidies from public budgets and weak environmental regulations. The concept of a "Green Economy" does not alter the logic of capitalism one iota.

Alliance 90/The Greens represent a layer of the middle class which is driven by concern for its privileged position in society and enviously looks at the luxury enjoyed by the super-rich. The petty selfishness of this social element is hidden behind seemingly democratic posturing—for

example, the use of town hall meetings to implement welfare cuts and restrictions on democratic rights.

On the issue of war, the Greens have already stripped themselves naked. The former pacifists have grown into militarists. They support the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) mission in Afghanistan and attack the federal government from the right for not participating in the war against Libya.

The programme of the PSG

The economic crisis cannot be resolved by making concessions to the corporations or accepting social cuts. As long as the banks and large corporations remain in the hands of a small, privileged minority, not a single social problem can be solved.

Our goal is a workers' government, which would expropriate the corporations and banks and implement policies to meet the needs of the population, not the profit interests of big business.

We fight for a programme to secure the inalienable and fundamental social rights of the working class:

The right to a job

The right to work is the most basic right of all. Without a permanent, well-paid job, all other needs cannot be satisfied. The loss of a job often means the loss of self-esteem, social exclusion and immense psychological stress. Many unemployed people are forced into low-wage jobs, resulting in the impoverishment of their families.

Therefore, all jobs must be defended as a matter of principle. This cannot be left to the unions and Betriebsräte (works councils), which are linked closely with management and sabotage any serious struggle. We advocate the establishment of committees of action, independent of the unions, which will make contact with workers at other factories and organize the occupation of plants at risk of closure and take steps to establish democratic control over production.

The right to a fair wage and adequate income

For years, wages have been systematically reduced in order to increase profits. With the introduction of the Hartz laws ten years ago, the then-SPD-Green Party federal government created an ever-growing low-wage sector. Despite having a full-time job, more and more workers earn so little that they are dependent on Hartz-IV welfare payments. Mounting poverty has disastrous consequences for the younger generation as well as older workers.

We call for a minimum monthly income of €1,500, financed by tax increases on the rich and super rich and a limit on the maximum income: €20,000 euros a month is enough for anyone!

The right to housing

The SPD-Left Party coalition has sold off over 100,000 state-owned apartments to international financial investors. The result is rising rents and soaring costs for fees and energy. Berlin is now regarded as the most interesting German city for real estate sharks because rents have risen faster here than anywhere else.

We demand the right to adequate housing and affordable electricity, gas and water supplies!

The right to leisure

Rising exploitation is linked to a relentless increase in work hours and a growing intensity of work. Millions of people are dependent on overtime and are forced to hold down multiple jobs to make ends meet. The eight-hour day—the demand that was first raised 150 years ago by the labour movement—is for many a relic of the distant past. While millions stand in line at the employment exchanges, the employers reduce their costs by extending work hours rather than hire new staff.

We reject this. Workers have a right to adequate time for their family and for leisure and cultural activities. This includes the right to holidays, as well as free childcare and free access to recreational and educational facilities for young people.

The right to education

The world of work is becoming increasingly complex and a high-quality education is essential. Both the vocational training system and the general education system, however, are continuing to deteriorate. Funding for education is being slashed to the bone, with teachers serving as scapegoats for the crisis in education. They are faced with job, wage and welfare cuts, increased work hours and ever-increasing class sizes.

Any talk of equal opportunity is a sham in a society where access to education depends largely on income. Education cannot be subordinated to the immediate requirements of the free market. It is an important basis for democratic participation in society. We therefore call for an end to the cuts and a massive programme of investment in kindergartens, schools, colleges and adult education, including museums, libraries and theatres. The collective knowledge of humanity must be made freely available to all on the Internet.

The right to a healthful and safe environment

Health and well-being depend on a healthful environment. It is impossible to prevent the destruction of the environment, however, when all social decisions are dictated by the profit motive.

The nuclear disaster in Fukushima shows the devastating consequences of nuclear energy within the framework of the profit system. The only way to end dependence on nuclear energy is through the expropriation of the major energy concerns and the development of alternative forms of renewable energy.

Abolition of discriminatory immigration laws!

Basic social rights apply to all people, regardless of their country of origin or religious belief. We fight for the full defence of the democratic and social rights of refugees and immigrants. Every worker must have the right to live and work in the country of his choice without restrictions.

Against war and militarism!

The war in Libya is not a “humanitarian” war in defence of human rights. As with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is an imperialist war. NATO countries are seeking to bomb to power a puppet regime that will more slavishly serve their interests than the dictatorship of Gaddafi. The war revolves around oil, gas, markets and strategic influence in Africa and the Middle East. We demand an immediate end to the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya and the withdrawal of all foreign troops, in particular the German army, from these countries.

The struggle against war is inextricably linked to the struggle against the roots of militarism in the capitalist system. The example of the Green Party shows that pacifism based on moral precepts quickly turns into its opposite when international tensions intensify.

For the international unity of workers and the United Socialist States of Europe!

The economic crisis has led to a sharp intensification of national egoism on the part of European governments. The European project is quickly unravelling. The main function of EU institutions is to shift the burden of the financial and economic crisis onto the shoulders of the population. This is the aim of the economic rules laid down by Brussels. Democratic rights are being systematically dismantled and preparations made for a

European police state. The European Commission has become synonymous with deregulation, liberalization and the dismantling of workers’ rights.

As is the case in Egypt and other Arab countries, revolutionary convulsions are on the agenda in Germany and Europe. Politicians and journalists warn against social conflict. The task facing the working class is to prepare for such a development and direct it on the basis of a clear, worked out revolutionary perspective. A mass rebellion is inevitable and necessary. Only the intervention of millions in political life can put an end to the autocratic power of the financial aristocracy.

The Socialist Equality Party is the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). It is based on the long heritage of revolutionary Marxism. The Fourth International was founded in 1938 by Leon Trotsky to defend the programme of socialist internationalism against Stalinism. Its roots go back to the Left Opposition, which fought from 1923 against the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union.

In order to conduct its election campaign, the Socialist Equality Party requires broad support to collect the necessary signatures, distribute its political material and carry out its ambitious programme of election meetings. It also requires generous donations to finance the election campaign. We appeal to all readers: Support the election campaign of the PSG! Actively assist the PSG and vote for the party on September 18!



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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