

Opening meeting of the SEP election campaign in Berlin

Our reporter
10 August 2011

The German Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, PSG) held its opening meeting last Saturday as it begins the most intensive phase of the current election campaign in Berlin.



Peter

Schwarz, a member of the editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, described the dire situation facing the world economy: “Last week witnessed the worst crisis since the collapse of the US Lehman Brothers bank in 2008. Worldwide, \$2.5 trillion in assets have been destroyed. The volatility in stock markets even surpasses that which took place prior to the assassination in Sarajevo that triggered the First World War. Politics has lost all control over the economy.”

The current crisis recalled the final period of the Weimar Republic, Schwarz noted. At that time the stock market crash of 1929 led within two years to a major collapse of the banks and unemployment for 7 million people in Germany.

As was the case at the end of the Weimar Republic, the bourgeoisie is responding today by burdening the working class with all the costs of the crisis. All over the world austerity programs are being implemented to drastically cut back the living standards of working people. A particularly dramatic example is Greece, where the already low standard of living is being further scaled back by cuts of 40 percent (by 2015), implemented by the country's social-democratic government.

As the crisis deepens—despite all of these cost-cutting measures—social and political conflicts continue to intensify. There is a heated debate in the ruling elite about how to respond to the crisis. Some suggest the “rescue of the euro”, which will entail the pumping of even more public money into the accounts of banks, in turn precipitating more austerity programs across Europe. Others seek to exclude defaulting countries from the Eurozone, with the consequence of national bankruptcies of entire states and the breakup of Europe.

Schwarz graphically described the threat of war, which results from such a development. The EU and its predecessors were, in the final analysis, the bourgeois response to 300 years of conflict in Europe. He recommended those who regard a future war in Europe as unthinkable to recall the war in Yugoslavia. “Who would have thought in 1990 that there would once again be such bloodletting in the region?” he asked.

The crisis is not due to incorrect political decisions, as the German Left Party seeks to maintain, Schwarz continued. It is deeply rooted in the laws of the capitalist system and its internal contradictions, which inevitably lead to profound crisis, as explained by Karl Marx.

The objective nature of the crisis does not mean it is the result of uncontrollable, anonymous processes. On the contrary, it is expressed in a sharp polarization of society and the emergence of a financial aristocracy that is ferociously defending its wealth and dictating policy in every aspect of economic and social life.

The high levels of state indebtedness is a result of declining taxes on high-income earners, shareholders and corporate profits, as well as the bank rescue packages of 2008, which amounted to almost €2 billion in Europe. Despite the crisis the wealth of the financial aristocracy has increased. According to the federal bank, the sum of private wealth during the last five quarters has increased by €350 billion in Germany alone.

These assets, however, are off limits to the government. All parties—whether conservative, liberal, green, social democratic or “left”—have completely subordinated themselves to the dictates of finance capital.

In this context, Schwarz outlined the policies of the Left Party, which has governed Berlin for 10 years in a coalition with the Social Democratic Party. “Their program contains a string of social promises”, he said, “but in the course of a decade here in Berlin, the party has demonstrated in practice the interests it represents. It has privatized housing, implemented job cuts in public services, approved tuition fees and actively supported cuts in wages. As soon as it assumes power the Left Party operates as an open instrument of big business and finance capital.”

Schwarz concluded by remarking that society was heading towards powerful revolutionary conflicts. The PSG's task was to politically prepare the working class for the forthcoming struggles. This priority sets us apart from all other parties who are fully committed to and defend the existing social order.

Christoph Vandreier, a candidate of the PSG in the election, then

spoke about the role of the extreme right. The danger represented by such forces was shown by the massacre in Oslo, he said, which could not be dismissed as the deed of a confused individual, but rather the product of years of anti-Islamic propaganda by the media and political circles. The involvement of a series of right-wing and neo-fascist parties in the Berlin state election in September indicated that these organizations had considerable financial backing.

Vandreier explained why the PSG had not taken part in the demonstration called for the same day by the Anti-Fascist alliance with the support of the Left Party and the Verdi trade union. The demonstration was nothing less than a token action aimed at hiding the fact that the social basis for the emergence of right-wing demagogues was in the first place the austerity policies introduced by the Left Party-SPD Senate in Berlin.

Years following the catastrophic consequences of the Third Reich, the fascists only dared now to raise their heads because of the role of the SPD, the Greens, the Left Party and the unions, which support the attacks on the working class and thereby allow the ultra-right to posture as the defenders of social rights. Instead of lining up with these parties in a symbolic protest against the neo-Nazis and providing a fig leaf for their policies, the PSG is intent on building a revolutionary alternative, Vandreier said.

In the ensuing discussion, one participant pointed out that Thilo Sarrazin, the author of a vile racist diatribe and the former finance minister of the SPD-Left Party coalition who implemented cuts in social services for seven years, remains a member of the SPD. The far-right party Pro-Germany had even put up posters proclaiming: “Vote for Thilo’s theses!”

At the beginning of his contribution, Ulrich Rippert, the chairman and leading election candidate of the PSG, posed the question of why—considering the dramatic nature of the economic crisis, wage and social benefit cuts, the massive expansion of the low-wage sector, the introduction of tuition fees, and countless other attacks on social conditions and living standards—there had not been mass protests. “Why is everything so quiet?” he asked, “Shouldn’t people be taking to the barricades?”

Rippert explained that the main reason for the reluctance of the working class to take action lay with the trade unions, the SPD and the Left Party. They had divided the working class through the creation of a low-wage sector and blocked any effective resistance by working closely with factory managements to prevent strikes. Above all, the Left Party has discredited socialist politics in the eyes of many workers and thereby prevented them from countering the attacks undertaken by the state.

“However,” Rippert said, “the longer the working class is restrained by these forces, while social conditions continue to deteriorate, the more explosive will be the eventual conflict with the bureaucracies.”

The quality of our party lies not in its current size, he said, but in its perspective and its historical foundation. On the one hand, we rely on the most powerful social force in society, the working class; on the other hand, we are part of an international movement, embodying the revolutionary experiences of generations. This equips us, like no other political force, for future conflicts and means that we approach the current situation with great optimism,

Rippert said.

In the ensuing discussion, Peter Schwarz once again explained how the National Socialist movement, which in the 1920s was initially composed of disgruntled soldiers returning from the front, was able to rapidly develop into a mass movement. The economic crisis and resulting mass unemployment provided the political breeding ground for the emergence of the extreme right, but it was the treachery of the SPD and German Communist Party (KPD) which then broke the resistance of the working class and paved the way for the Nazis to take power. For precisely this reason it was vital today to put forward a clear class policy and not gloss over political differences, but rather clarify these important issues and reject any policy based on class collaboration.

When asked by an audience member what the PSG would do if it were elected to the Berlin Senate, Ulrich Rippert replied: “We are using this campaign to build our party, win new members in the current political debate and increase our presence and influence within the working class. However, should we be elected to parliament, we would use every opportunity to publicly expose the machinations of bourgeois politics. We would make public all those deals conducted behind the scenes and make clear that the future of society will be decided not in parliament, but rather through class struggle.”

One meeting participant, who had reported from Cairo on the Egyptian revolution for the *World Socialist Web Site*, described how rapidly social and political processes had developed in the course of the current global crisis. On January 23 or 24 no one could predict what would happen over the next few days in Egypt. At the same time, there are many parallels between the situation in pre-revolutionary Cairo and Berlin. He was convinced that social tensions that had built up over years could lead to a similar explosion in Germany.

He also drew attention to the biggest problem of the Egyptian revolution, namely the lack of revolutionary leadership and the corruption and betrayal of the bourgeois pseudo-left forces. These organizations rejected the demand raised by Egyptian workers for a second revolution, and joined together in a motley alliance of various political forces aimed at stabilizing bourgeois rule and the military regime.

A collection at the end of the meeting provided a large sum to finance the election campaign and was a clear sign of the determination of those in attendance to participate in the building of the PSG as the revolutionary party of the working class.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact