

The fight against rent increases, welfare cuts and poverty requires the building of a new political party

Socialist Equality Party Germany (PSG)
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The following statement was distributed as a flier by PSG election officials at a demonstration in Berlin last Saturday.

Under the motto "Enough is enough!", a coalition of initiatives representing various city districts, tenants and the unemployed have joined with trade unions and other groups to call for a demonstration this Saturday against rent increases, social marginalisation and poverty in Berlin-Kreuzberg.

The organisers have expressly banned the participation of political parties. "Parties and their symbols have no place in this demonstration", says the official call to protest.

This applies not only to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Free Democratic Party (FDP), Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Left Party, who are responsible for rent increases and cuts in social services in the capital city and nationally, but also to the Socialist Equality Party of Germany (PSG). Replying to an enquiry, the organisers declared that party literature, party banners and party flags of the PSG "will not be tolerated at the demonstration".

This constitutes a blatant act of censorship. The PSG is campaigning in the lower house city elections as the only party with a socialist programme directly targeting the anti-social policies of the SPD-Left Party Senate. One of our posters, hanging in thousands throughout the whole of Berlin, urges: "Down with the exorbitant rents! Affordable accommodation is a fundamental right. Expropriate the property of the landlord racketeers! Put electricity, gas and water supply under the democratic control of workers and tenants!"

The organisers' suppression of these slogans exposes the demonstration as an utter farce. A political perspective is an absolute necessity in the fight against extortionate rents and welfare cuts. But such a perspective can only be developed if it is openly discussed and each participant in the demonstration is given the chance to form his or her own opinion. This is exactly what the organisers are aiming to

prevent with their gag order.

They justify the banning of parties on the grounds that "the parties" have abolished social housing and sold off the municipal building societies. But it is not the existence of political parties as such that is responsible for these policies; rather, quite specific parties are to blame: the Left Party and the SPD in Berlin, as well as the CDU and Christian Social Union (CSU) alliance, the FDP and the Greens in other regions of Germany.

It is absolutely right to reject these parties. But it is wrong to dismiss political parties in general.

To do so means leaving the field to the Left Party and the SPD. Driving them from office entails establishing a political alternative representing the interests of working people and not those of the banks and rent sharks. This is exactly what the PSG is doing.

The banning of parties from today's demonstration is profoundly undemocratic. For 40 years prior to the fall of the Wall, residents of East Berlin experienced what it means when political parties and the expression of personal opinions are censored. The suppression of workers' democracy finally led to the collapse of the former Stalinist German Democratic Republic (GDR). Nevertheless, the organisers of Saturday's demonstration want to determine which opinions can and can't be expressed. This is presumptuous and arrogant.

In reality, they want to prevent the expulsion of the Left Party and the SPD from Berlin City Hall. This is why—two weeks before the second chamber election—they placed a muzzle on the PSG, the only party prepared to build an alternative from the left to the discredited political parties.

The organisers don't want to do away with the SPD-Left Party Senate, but merely pressure it—and that strategy requires the SPD and the Left Party to keep power! They use the protest against rent increases and welfare cuts to help SPD Mayor Klaus Wowereit's Senate to secure another term in office. However, the Senate will not change its policy

under pressure from the street; this has been more than amply demonstrated over the past ten years.

Trade unions have been invited to the demonstration, although their officials are card-carrying members of the SPD, the Left Party and the Greens. In particular, the Verdi public service union has cooperated closely with the Senate to demolish municipal jobs and cut wages over the past ten years.

Susanne Stumpfenhusen, Verdi chair of the Berlin-Brandenburg federal region, supports the welfare cuts in Berlin, has close contacts with the Left Party and SPD, and occupies the post of vice-chair of the Berlin Water Works supervisory board alongside Senator Harald Wolf (Left Party), the head of the board.

Many of the neighbourhood initiatives, support groups and community associations calling for the demonstration have close links with the Left Party and SPD. They enjoy the support of these parties, and are also sometimes financed by them. Although most try to hide their political identity, they have close connections with City Hall and the trade union headquarters.

Here are some examples of organisations that have put their names to the call for the demonstration:

-- The "Acting Together" association is supported by—among others—the Left Party, the SPD and the Greens, as well as Verdi and the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB).

-- The Berlin S-Bahn-Tisch (a commuter initiative) is largely a project of the SAV (Socialist Alternative), a group operating inside and campaigning for the Left Party in the coming election. Rouzbeh Taheri, a leading figure in the S-Bahn-Tisch, was formerly a member of the Party of Democratic Socialism's (PDS) national executive and spokesman for the group's federal policies. Later he headed the Berlin Social Alliance and was in the state executive committee of the Election Alternative for Jobs and Social Justice (WASG), which is now an integral part of the Left Party.

-- A grouping within the IG Metall trade union, the GEW-Jugend (German Education Union youth group) and Attac Berlin (a group advocating taxation of foreign exchange transactions), are primarily composed of members of the Senate parties and of the Greens. Stephanie Hanisch, spokesperson for the GEW-Jugend, is a member of the Left Party in Neukölln. Bröckl Lena, spokesperson for Attac Berlin, is on the SPD's national committee.

-- The coordinating group of Berlin's unemployed trade unionists association (KOK) consists of committees for the unemployed within the Verdi public service union and the Berlin branch of the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB). Verdi's committee for unemployment in the media

industries calls for the election of the Left Party.

-- The "Stop the Rent Increases" Internet blog lists Ulrike Haase as a contact person. Haase is spokesperson for the Left Party in Kreuzberg and stood as the Left Party's candidate for the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district council assembly.

So much for the alleged party political neutrality of the sponsors and initiators of the demonstration. The Senate parties, the SPD and the Left Party, will attend the protest disguised as trade unionists and members of various initiatives. However, the PSG is not permitted to openly present itself on the day. The banning of political parties has obviously been instigated to shield the Senate parties from criticism. Genuine political debate is being intentionally suppressed.

The deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s is rousing broad layers of the population against the ruling parties. What began in Tunisia, Egypt, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Israel is set to spread to other countries, to Germany and to Berlin.

The PSG is working to give these movements an orientation and a perspective. It is fighting for an international socialist programme consistently promoting the interests of working people. It refuses to make any concessions to capitalism's so-called "necessary constraints", but advocates the expropriation of the banks and major corporations, and their subordination to the democratic control of the population. As the German section of the Fourth International, it stands in the tradition of Marxism and the Left Opposition against Stalinism.

We invite all those who really want to fight against exorbitant rents and welfare cuts to study the programme and perspectives of the PSG, to read the *World Socialist Web Site*, to attend the PSG election meetings, and to vote for the PSG on September 18.



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