The significance of the Berlin elections

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The elections to the Berlin House of Representatives (state legislature) on Sunday contain important political lessons for the working class worldwide.

The elections were held in the midst of the greatest economic crisis since the 1930s. As was the case at the end of the Weimar Republic eighty years ago, not only banks but entire states now stand on a financial precipice. The euro, the second most important currency in the world after the dollar, is in serious danger.

The ruling class has only one answer to the crisis: massive attacks on the working class. Greece shows the intentions of the European and international financial aristocracy in Europe and throughout the world. The social infrastructure of an entire country is being destroyed, state enterprises privatized and workers' living standards reduced to the level of their grandfathers.

Faced with this crisis, any hope of social improvement within the framework of capitalist society is doomed to failure. This is the first important lesson of the Berlin elections.

After ten years in office, the Social Democratic Party-Left Party Senate (state executive) was rebuffed by the voters. When it came to power as part of the coalition in 2001, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), forerunner of the Left Party, won 22.6 percent of the vote. Last Sunday, despite the PDS merger with the Election Alternative (WASG) to form the Left Party, its vote was cut by half. In absolute numbers, the Left Party lost nearly 200,000 votes, equal to almost two thirds of its previous voters.

While the working class is turning away from the Left Party, the Socialist Alternative (SAV), Marx21 and other petty-bourgeois groups are trying to bolster the influence of this bureaucratic apparatus, which emerged from the remnants of the Stalinist party in the former East Germany and a wing of the Social Democratic trade union bureaucracy. Their cynicism knows no bounds. It even extends to welcoming the recent electoral defeat, since, now that the Left Party is in opposition, it is in a better position to churn out left-wing clichés.

Under these conditions, the election campaign of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party—PSG) was of enormous importance. It led to a sharp political polarization. On the one side stood all the establishment parties, from right to left, together with the unions, supported by SAV, Marx21 and other groups. On the other side stood the PSG, with an international socialist programme based on the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe.

This political polarization is very important, because it is part of a class differentiation which is now developing very rapidly.

The PSG is the only party to relentlessly expose the anti-working class policies of the SPD-Left Party Senate and fight against them on the basis of an international socialist perspective. It clearly explained the urgent necessity to break politically with the SPD, the Left Party and the unions in order to avoid a repetition of the catastrophe of the 1930s. The political putrefaction of society is increasing rapidly. The ruling class is resorting to attempts to channel the social crisis along racist and nationalist lines.

The PSG election campaign was directly linked to a political offensive against the petty-bourgeois

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defenders of the SPD-Left Party Senate. The rapid rightward shift of the groups from the milieu of the Stalinist, Maoist and Pabloite organizations, which are closely linked with the trade union bureaucracy, can be observed everywhere. During the war in Libya, many of these formations came out as vehement defenders of imperialist aggression. Like the trade union bureaucracy, they belong to a privileged social layer that was engaged in organizing class compromise in the context of Germany's post-war policy of "social partnership." They now feel threatened by the economic crisis and the sharpening of class relations and fly into the arms of the capitalist state. They are a part of the bourgeois order, and offer themselves as pillars of future governments, facing the working class with barely concealed hostility.

The PSG's political offensive against them is based on the decades of principled struggle against opportunism and nationalism conducted by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

The election in Berlin took place on the 40th anniversary of the founding of the German section of the ICFI. From the beginning, the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (League of Socialist Workers, BSA), forerunner of the PSG, worked to defend Marxism against all those who adapted themselves to the Stalinist or social democratic bureaucracy, and who claimed that it was possible to realize the interests of workers within the framework the capitalist system.

In the founding document of the Fourth International, the *Transitional Programme*, Leon Trotsky wrote, under the heading "Against Unprincipled Opportunism and Revisionism":

"The Fourth International declares uncompromising war on the bureaucracies of the Second, Third, Amsterdam and Anarcho-syndicalist Internationals, as on their centrist satellites; on reformism without reforms; democracy in alliance with the GPU; pacifism without peace; anarchism in the service of the bourgeoisie; on 'revolutionists' who live in deathly fear of revolution. All of these organizations are not pledges for the future, but decayed survivals of the past. The epoch of wars and revolutions will raze them to the ground."

These words have great relevance today. As always in history, the fight against opportunism rises to the highest importance on the eve of revolutionary struggles.

Anyone who thinks today's problems can be solved by a few demonstrations and protest votes is making a big mistake. As interest in the policies of the PSG grew during the campaign, the media built up the Pirate Party and gave it prominence. That such a party, which regards all political questions with complete superficiality, and is proud of its ignorance, could win almost nine percent of the vote must be seen as a warning. It is a sign of profound political disorientation and confusion. Behind the scenes, this organization is controlled by very conservative forces.

The Berlin elections show how urgent it is that the working class intervene as an independent political force. It is a great success that the PSG was able to triple its vote through a principled and uncompromising campaign against the Left Party and its middle-class defenders.

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