

Resolution of the National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Germany)

The return of class struggle and the tasks of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party)

15 August 2012

The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party of Germany--PSG) held its National Congress in Berlin on June 22-24, 2012. In addition to delegates from Germany, representatives and co-thinkers of the International Committee of the Fourth International from other European countries, the United States, Australia and Sri Lanka attended the congress. The discussion focused on the crisis of the European Union and the political tasks arising from it. This was the subject of the main resolution, adopted unanimously by the congress, which the WSWS posted on August 14. Today we are posting the second resolution. The remaining two will be posted in the coming days.

1. In its fourth year, the financial and economic crisis of world capitalism is focused on Europe. The euro and the European Union are faced with collapse. Their demise signals in turn the disintegration of the framework which provided the basis for Germany's political and economic development since the Second World War, enabling it to conduct business worldwide and expand trade and production under the umbrella of the United States, and to base itself on Europe as a home market. As in the 1930s, the productive capacity of the German economy is its Achilles heel. Because of its dependence on exports, it is particularly vulnerable to the global economic crisis and the growth of tensions among the imperialist powers. This undermines the policy of social compromise that subdued class antagonisms in the post-war period and places sharp class struggles back on the agenda.

2. Germany's ruling class is reacting to the crisis with increasing aggressiveness, attempting to subjugate the whole of Europe to its dictates. Almost 70 years after German soldiers reduced Europe to rubble, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) parliamentary leader Volker Kauder arrogantly proclaims: "Now, German is spoken in Europe again". Thus, all the unresolved problems of the past begin to reemerge. Instead of resolving the European debt crisis, Berlin's enforcement of ruthless austerity is shattering the European Union. It sharpens social contradictions, drives whole nations to ruin, and exacerbates national tensions. In the last century, Germany attempted twice—first under Wilhelm II and then under Hitler—to make itself the master of Europe. Both attempts ended in war and barbarism. The renewed attempt to subordinate Europe to German dominance can lead only to disaster once again.

3. The dilemma of European politics is compounded by the dilemma of international politics. German imperialism has repeatedly resorted to aggressive wars to try to overcome the disadvantages of its central

position in Europe, its dependence on energy imports and its need for markets. Now conflicts are again intensifying. The traditional German orientation to the West is increasingly strained by the country's energy dependence on Russia and expanding trade with the East. Since 2009, China has been Germany's most important trading partner outside the EU, mainly due to high imports from China. This year, China will also overtake the US as Germany's most important export market: German exports to China amounting to €85 billion will significantly exceed those to the US (€78 billion). The German export drive is also spurred on by the rise of India and Brazil.

4. The conflict between the political and military ties with the US and the economic orientation towards Russia and China has divided the German bourgeoisie and cut across all the political parties. Former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Social Democratic Party—SPD), who, as a spokesman for the energy and auto industries, pushed ahead with rapprochement with Russia and China, retired from office prematurely in 2005. But that did not settle the issue. His successor faces the same dilemma. Although Chancellor Angela Merkel sharply criticised Schröder when he decided against German participation in the Iraq war in 2003, she refused to participate in the Libyan war in deference to Russia and China in 2011. The more aggressively the US establishes its control over the Middle East and escalates confrontation with China and Russia, the more the German bourgeoisie is forced to unequivocally align itself with one side or the other—a decision it wants to avoid at all costs.

5. There is general agreement, however, among all the political parties that Germany should once again rattle its sabers and raise its military profile in order to have a say in international affairs and press home its interests. Articles in specialist journals avidly discuss how Germany might again be able to "take the lead", rid itself of the stigma of its past, and overcome the deep-rooted anti-militarism amongst broad layers of the population. In 1999, the Greens opened the door for the return of the German military to international war zones in Yugoslavia. Since then, German troops have been deployed in Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa and other regions of the world. The remodeling and upgrading of the army is advancing rapidly.

6. Western orientation and European integration provided the framework for the social compromise of the post-war period. Globalisation, the collapse of the Soviet Union and China's rise as a major industrial power have undermined this compromise. Now its death-blow is being delivered by the breakup of the European Union. Mounting social deprivation and ceaseless attacks on wages, pensions and social

standards are heralding violent class struggles. Beneath the surface, a social storm is brewing in Germany that will shake all social relations to their foundations and set the overthrow of capitalism on the agenda.

7. Day by day, it is becoming more difficult for millions of workers to provide the basic necessities of life for themselves and their families. Nearly a quarter of all employees work in low-wage jobs. Half of them, 4.1 million people, earn less than €7 an hour. Systematic wage dumping is taking place in factories and offices. In addition to temporary workers, who have been exploited by employment agencies for years, there has been a growth of the army of contracted workers, employed to do piece work without any social security. Some 4.5 million people live on Hartz IV welfare benefits—€374 a month, plus rent and heating expenses.

8. At the other end of society wealth is piling up. A privileged in-crowd lives the high life. Their luxury and extravagance know no bounds. The 2010 World Wealth Report counted 924,000 millionaires in Germany, 62,000 more than the previous year. In 2011, Volkswagen CEO Martin Winterkorn collected over €17 million, making a monthly salary of €1.5 million. His fellow board members received well over half a million euros monthly. This orgy of enrichment was approved by the nine workers' representatives on the supervisory board—headed by IG Metall trade union boss Berthold Huber—who themselves pocketed several million.

9. The tight integration of trade unions, businesses and the state has formed the core of the so-called "German model". This corporatist structure was associated with an increase in living standards in the post-war era. Now it serves exclusively to reduce living standards and suppress the class struggle—until that struggle violently breaks out on its own path and, to the horror of trade union bureaucrats, bursts the boundaries of normal wage conflicts, developing into a battle for political power.

10. The shock waves of impending class confrontations are already making themselves felt. All the established parties are in an advanced stage of political decay. The CDU and CSU (Christian Social Union) threaten to split along political and regional fault lines. The Free Democratic Party (FDP), which for decades shaped German foreign policy, has at times plummeted in polls to the level of a fringe party. The CDU-CSU-FDP alliance is able to cling to power mainly due to the support of the SPD, which has never recovered from the loss of voters and party members it suffered during the Schröder era.

11. With the election of Joachim Gauck as federal president, two former East German citizens are heading the state and the government—individuals who have been politicized by the most reactionary event of recent decades: the destruction of the social achievements in the former East Germany (German Democratic Republic—GDR), Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the reintroduction of capitalist exploitation in those countries. They combine political narrow-mindedness with boundless anti-communism. They regard freedom and democracy as synonymous with personal enrichment, privilege and capitalist exploitation. Their political evolution has above all been determined by the fact that they have never faced a serious challenge from the working class. They will seek to counter the German working class with the same ruthlessness they currently display toward the people of Greece.

12. Under the pressure of the economic crisis, the democratic façade is crumbling. Democratic rights are being trampled underfoot and the state security and surveillance apparatus is systematically being upgraded. With the ban of the Blockupy protests in Frankfurt, protests against the power of the banks have for the first time been declared illegal. Racism and xenophobia are systematically being fomented—especially in the form of incitement against Muslims. Thilo Sarrazin's racist theories have been widely promoted by leading newspapers and public television talk shows. Neo-Nazi groups are being financed and built up by the intelligence services via undercover agents, while murderous ultra-right-wing gangs such as the National Socialist Underground are shielded by the authorities

or deliberately overlooked. In this way, the ruling elite is preparing the ground for a new ultra-right political party.

13. At the same time, the growth of social struggles across the globe indicates that the crisis of capitalism is being registered in the consciousness of the international working class, the basic revolutionary force in the world. But the spontaneous struggles of workers, no matter how radical, do not resolve the crisis of political orientation and revolutionary leadership. The old reformist parties and trade unions use whatever remains of their influence to quell the growing opposition or divert it into harmless channels. As always in times of great political upheaval, the early stage of a developing mass movement is characterised by a gulf between the historic scale of the crisis and the existing consciousness of the masses who are being drawn into struggle.

14. The working class learns through the experiences it accumulates in its struggles—not merely in the course of immediate workplace conflicts but also through such major international class confrontations as those currently taking place in Greece and Egypt. To make these experiences conscious, to generalise them and transform them into the basis of a systematic political education is an important task. The theoretical and political legacy of the International Committee of the Fourth International serves as the basis for this undertaking. It is the starting point for a careful analysis of the diverse and sometimes surprising changes in the political situation and the development of an independent perspective for the working class.

15. The PSG's task is to overcome the gulf between the maturity of the objective situation and the political consciousness of the working class. It does so by educating a Marxist cadre within the working class and building a new, revolutionary leadership. The capitalist crisis creates the objective conditions for the socialist revolution, but only a party anchored in key sectors of the working class with a comprehensive and worked out political strategy can lead the working class to power. The PSG develops the political perspectives without which a serious, persistent and victorious struggle is impossible. The daily analysis and perspectives published by the *World Socialist Web Site* play a central role in this work.

16. The PSG strives to win far-sighted and selfless workers and young people and train them on the basis of the history and theoretical Marxist heritage of the Trotskyist movement. They must understand the role played by Stalinism, social democracy, the trade unions and other opportunist tendencies, which are responsible for previous defeats of the working class and the survival of capitalism. Only when the most politically conscious workers have assimilated the strategic experiences of the 20th century can they lead their class on the basis of an independent political perspective. That is the role and function of the PSG. There is no alternative to patiently undertaking this work. There are no tactical short cuts. Under all conditions the PSG fights for its revolutionary program and tells workers the truth: that there is no way forward apart from the overthrow of capitalism and the conquest of political power.

17. To accomplish this task, the PSG turns deliberately to the working class. We support and encourage the struggles and protests carried out by workers and youth to repel the attacks of the government and the corporations. We put forward a program of transitional demands "to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution", demands that "stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class" lead unalterably "to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat." (Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Program*) These demands include the defence of jobs and wages, a guaranteed basic income, decent and affordable accommodation, free access to quality medical care, education and culture, higher taxes for top incomes, the introduction of a wealth tax, and similar social demands. The PSG tirelessly defends basic democratic rights, particularly the rights of immigrants and refugees, and calls for the withdrawal of all German

troops abroad and the dissolution of NATO, the armed forces and the intelligence agencies.

18. All the political and the practical initiatives of the PSG are aimed at differentiating the independent interests of the working class from the paralysing influence of social democracy, the Left Party, the trade unions and their petit-bourgeois supporters. These organisations today play a key role in suppressing the struggles of the working class, implementing the attacks of the ruling class, and defending the bourgeois order. The working class cannot fight for a socialist program if their hands are tied by compromises with these representatives of bourgeois interests.

19. As so often in times of crisis, the SPD has become one of the most important props of the bourgeois order. The federal government, divided on so many issues, continues to hold power thanks only to the SPD's support. The SPD broke with its Marxist past in 1914 when it supported the First World War and allied itself with German imperialism. During the Weimar Republic it was the political backbone of the bourgeois state. It suppressed the workers' uprisings after the First World War and contributed decisively to Hitler's victory by opposing the mobilisation of the working class against the Nazis. After the Second World War, the SPD regained influence due to the crimes of Stalinism and the post-war boom. When violent labour disputes and student revolts shook the capitalist order in the late 1960s, the FDP helped the SPD attain a governing majority, and Willy Brandt regained control of the situation by granting social concessions on the one hand and banning socialists from certain occupations (*Berufsverbote*) on the other.

20. The SPD and the unions were able to dominate the West German working class because the Stalinist regime in the GDR simultaneously held East German workers in check. Both bureaucracies propagated—albeit from different sides—the lie that “genuine socialism” existed in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and East Germany. In the name of socialism, the Stalinist bureaucracy of the GDR suppressed every independent movement and democratic action by workers, providing ammunition to the anti-communism of the social democratic bureaucracy. After 1945, both the German Communist Party (KPD) and the SPD opposed the spontaneous socialist aspirations of workers. The East German regime nationalized capitalist property only in response to the Cold War, and then brutally suppressed the workers' uprising of June 17, 1953. The nationalizations strengthened the social position of the working class, while the socialist ideals that many ordinary members of the KPD and SPD sought to realize in the GDR after the war were discredited by the political oppression of the working class. The East German regime based itself on the crimes of Stalin and his nationalist theory of “socialism in one country”, which cut East German workers off from their brothers in other countries and finally prepared the path for the restoration of capitalism in 1989.

21. Today, in the SPD's vocabulary, “reform” no longer means social concessions to the workers, but rather the rescinding of all concessions. Since the Brandt era, the SPD has lost half its membership and severed all relations with the working class. The Agenda 2010 of the Schröder government, a coalition of the SPD and the Green Party, is praised by today's conservative European governments as a role model. The Schröder-Fischer government was responsible for the emergence of a huge low-wage sector and the smallest increase in unit labour costs in Europe. It was also responsible for the first international war effort in the history of the post-war German armed forces and upgraded the internal security apparatus as part of the “war on terror”. The SPD currently supports Merkel's austerity measures in Europe. It is a right-wing, bourgeois party that promotes the interests of big business and the financial elite as unreservedly as the CDU-CSU and the FDP. Because of this, it has largely lost its ability to maintain control over the working class.

22. This is where the Left Party comes in. It endeavours to breathe new

life into the social democratic apparatus. A political pupil of Willy Brandt, Oskar Lafontaine learned to appreciate the importance of this apparatus and the unions for keeping the working class under control and maintaining the stability of the bourgeois order. He has a long history in this respect as mayor of Saarbrücken and prime minister of Saarland. His falling out with Schröder was due to the fact that Schröder too readily gambled with this capacity of the SPD. For this reason, Lafontaine resigned from the SPD and abandoned his government posts in 1999, becoming politically active again when the first spontaneous protests against the Agenda 2010 developed. He then took the initiative to merge a group of disgruntled SPD officials, trade union bureaucrats and middle-class ex-radicals in the West (the WASG) with the heirs of the East German Stalinist state party (the PDS) and the financially strong apparatus bequeathed by that party in the East.

23. The deepening economic crisis has rapidly revealed the true character of the Left Party. In eastern German municipalities and state governments it has dismantled social and democratic provisions—a process that it condemns in its election manifestos. The constant balancing act between leftist words and right-wing deeds is the source of unending quarrels within the Left Party. It is deeply divided, has squandered its initial electoral success, and is debilitated by falling membership. But this does not exclude that the ruling class will need its services once again.

24. The Left Party is—like the *Parti de gauche* in France, Syriza in Greece and similar movements in other countries—neither a left nor an anti-capitalist and certainly not a revolutionary party. It is a bourgeois organisation based on well-off layers in the state apparatus, the trade unions and the middle class. These layers see their existence threatened both by the austerity dictates of the banks and a revolutionary offensive by the working class. Therefore, they rail against the banks while in practice defending capitalism, the bourgeois state and the institutions of the European Union and working closely with the unions to suppress the struggles of workers. The Left Party wants at all costs to avoid an independent mobilisation of the working class. In the class struggle it is not on the side of the working class, but its opponents.

24. The struggle against the Left Party requires a systematic political and theoretical offensive against petty-bourgeois groups operating in its ranks or within its political orbit. Some of these groups—such as the SAV-Socialist Initiative, Marx21, and the Pabloites of the United Secretariat—falsely call themselves socialist or even Trotskyist. They insist on the subordination of the working class to the bureaucratic apparatuses. They are themselves part of this corrupt bureaucratic milieu. Many of their functionaries and members have well-paid positions in the trade union bureaucracy, the administration of the welfare state, or the parliamentary offices of the Left Party or its associated foundations. Their hostility to the working class pushes them to the right as the class struggle intensifies. They regard any independent movement of workers as a threat to their own privileges. They act as a watchdog for the trade union bureaucracy, defend the sellout of strikes, and attack workers whenever they take the initiative to free themselves from the straitjacket of the unions.

26. SAV, Marx21 and the Pabloites are representatives of international tendencies that have operated for six decades in the shadow of the reformist, Stalinist and trade union apparatuses, and have specialized in defending them. They now openly support imperialism and integrate themselves into the bourgeois state. Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists, allies of Marx21, give their backing to the presidential candidates of the reactionary Muslim Brotherhood. Christine Buchholz, a member of Marx21, participates in the secret meetings of the Defense Committee in the German federal parliament. Most of these groups supported the imperialist war against Libya and now advocate imperialist intervention in Syria. The International Committee of the Fourth International has opposed these tendencies since its inception 59 years ago. This rich

historical heritage today provides the foundation for the political education of workers and the winning of the masses to an independent revolutionary perspective.

27. The political bankruptcy of the trade unions and the Left Party has brought on the scene various anarchist groupings that try to prevent a conscious political break from the old organizations by glorifying the spontaneity of social movements or raising syndicalist demands for grassroots unions. These autonomous and anarchist groups are characterised by their subjectivism. They reject a class analysis of society. They substitute for an understanding of society's objective driving forces and potential for collective change subjective liberation from social norms, with enlightened intellectuals designated as the agents of change. By writing off the working class they accept the existing order and the dominance of the bureaucracy—despite all their apparent radicalism and propensity for violent confrontations. The hostility of these groups towards the working class drives them to the right the more class antagonisms sharpen and workers begin to defend themselves independently of the old bureaucracies. They regard any independent stirring among workers as a threat to their own privileges. They also provide the social base for extreme right-wing tendencies, such as the so-called “anti-Germans” who have emerged from this milieu and now propagate imperialist and racist views extremely hostile to the working class.

28. A characteristic expression of today's general political instability is the rapid rise of the Pirate Party, which has taken seats in four state legislatures since September 2011 and registered double-digit approval ratings in nationwide polls. Having previously formed a solid foundation for the bourgeois order, the middle class has started to move. The Pirates articulate a general unease with the established parties without giving it a progressive orientation. While the Greens articulated the protest of petit-bourgeois layers in their early phase, there is no real element of protest to be found within the Pirates. They merely call for more transparency in decision-making. Otherwise, they are fully adapted to the status quo, defend the bourgeois order, including cuts in social services and the balanced budget amendment, and are willing to form a coalition with any party. Chaired by a person who works as a high-ranking civil servant in the federal Defence Ministry, the party is completely uncritical of the state. Their mixture of political naivety and social ruthlessness makes the Pirates a useful instrument for the ruling class when it comes to maintaining its grip on fractious elements of the middle classes and positioning them against the working class.

29. The PSG is convinced that the economic crisis and brutal attacks on social and democratic rights will trigger massive class confrontations. The return of aggressive forms of German imperialism will compel the working class to draw on its rich revolutionary traditions. The program of world socialist revolution, unswervingly defended by the ICFI for decades, will attract the most courageous and advanced sections of the working class, young people and serious intellectuals. Everything depends on a determined and bold turn to the working class and the education of a cadre in the teachings and traditions of the Fourth International. Basing itself on the rich political experience of the International Committee, the PSG is well prepared and looks forward with great confidence to the coming struggles.



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