

SEP (Germany) election statement

A socialist program against social cuts and unemployment in Europe

15 May 2013

The Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG) is standing a total of eight candidates in three German states (Hessian, North Rhine Westphalia, and the city-state of Berlin) in the general election due to be held on September 22. PSG members and supporters are currently collecting the thousands of support signatures necessary, according to German electoral law, for its candidates. Below is the statement prepared by the PSG announcing its participation in the election.

The Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG) is running candidates in the September 22 general election in Germany. Our goal is to unite workers and youth in Germany and Europe in the struggle against social cuts, unemployment and militarism, and for the defence of democratic rights. Our campaign is part of a global campaign by the International Committee of the Fourth International to build revolutionary socialist workers' parties.

The election comes amid the deepest crisis of world capitalism since the 1930s. Europe stands on the eve of massive class struggles. It is more deeply divided today than during the period of the Berlin Wall and the "Iron Curtain", by an ever-widening gulf between rich and poor that runs across the continent. The number of people who can no longer finance their livelihoods, rent or education is growing daily, while a minority lives in obscene wealth and imposes their diktat on society.

Five years ago, this financial aristocracy drove the world economy to the brink of collapse with their criminal speculation. European governments then pumped €1.6 trillion of public money to rescue ailing banks. Now these funds are being retrieved from the working population through cuts in spending on social welfare, education, pensions and health.

The government led by Angela Merkel plays the leading role in the process. Acting as if the disaster of 1933 had never happened, Berlin insists on implementing ruthless austerity measures throughout Europe, throwing millions into unemployment and poverty. Berlin utilises the EU and the euro to direct capital flows to Germany, plundering and dominating the weaker countries in Europe. Its arrogant behaviour inflames national antagonisms and rivalries. European governments agree essentially on only one question: i.e. that the burden crisis must be put squarely on the backs of the working class.

The European Union is now showing its true face. Far from embodying the "unity of Europe", it represents the dictatorship of finance capital over Europe. The diktats from Brussels and Berlin are destroying welfare systems, denying millions of elderly their well-earned pensions and driving countless families into want and misery. The aim of the European elite is to establish "Chinese conditions" across Europe in the name of competitiveness.

Greece reveals the future of the European Union. Five austerity packages in three years have led to an explosion of unemployment. Wages and pensions have plummeted by an average of 40 percent, the country's health and education systems are collapsing, and poverty, hunger and homelessness are spreading.

Twenty-six million people are currently without jobs in the European

Union. In Spain and Greece, almost one third of adults and two thirds of all young people are without jobs. In Germany, the official unemployment rate is only 7 percent, but of 42 million workers, only 29 million are covered by social insurance. The remaining work in precarious conditions, with 4 million earning less than €7 an hour.

At the other pole of society, the financial aristocracy are enriching themselves from the crisis. Share prices stand at record levels. The richest 1 percent of the German population now own over a third of net financial assets, more than the poorest 90 percent. A board member of a German listed corporation earns as much as 200 workers, 10 times more than 25 years ago. Even the bailout funds for indebted countries end up in the accounts of the financial aristocracy. Of the €188 billion in aid to Greece, just €5 billion actually found their way into the Greek budget. The rest went to the banks, hedge funds and other private creditors.

Social tensions are mounting across Europe. Dissatisfaction, anger and discontent are growing. Against a background of unceasing social attacks, broad layers of the population are losing confidence in the economic viability and moral justification of capitalism. The bourgeois media is publicly discussing how long it will take before Europe "goes up in flames".

The interests of workers, young people, the unemployed and pensioners find no expression in the official political life of Europe. However, under the surface, an enormous social storm is brewing. In response, the established parties are closing ranks. Whether they call themselves conservative, liberal, social democratic, green or "left", all of the mainstream parties support the EU's austerity diktats or try to divert opposition to them in a right-wing, chauvinistic direction.

The United Socialist States of Europe

The PSG election campaign gives a voice and political orientation to the widespread opposition to the austerity policies of Berlin and Brussels. The PSG is the only party running in the election that rejects both the European Union and all forms of nationalism. Our goal is the United Socialist States of Europe. Only through the unification of Europe on a socialist basis can the working class bring their own interests to bear, prevent Europe from relapsing into nationalism and war, and use the continent's enormous wealth and productive forces to serve the interests of society as a whole.

The cause of the economic and social crisis is the bankruptcy of the global capitalist system. Capitalism cannot be reformed. All efforts to overcome the crisis and tackle pressing social problems flounder in the face of the private ownership of the means of production, the anarchy of the capitalist market, the economic demands of the profit system and, not least, the insatiable greed of the ruling class. Not a single social problem can be solved without the breaking the power of the financial oligarchy.

This requires placing the big corporations and banks into social ownership. In private ownership they are used exclusively to bolster the profits of shareholders and owners. Socially owned, and under democratic control, they can be used to satisfy social needs such as providing secure jobs, education, culture, health and old-age care, and social security.

To realize this socialist programme, we fight for the unity of the European working class across all national, ethnic and other boundaries. We turn especially to the millions of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Turkey, North Africa and many other countries who live in Germany and Europe. In order to fight against the social counter-revolution, workers must unite. When it resists all attempts to divide its ranks, the working class is an invincible force. In our campaign, we work closely with the other sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International. We will also present our programme in other European countries.

A socialist programme cannot be implemented on the basis of the existing institutions, governments and parties. It requires the active intervention of the working class in the political process and the establishment of workers' governments, resting on the working class—i.e. the vast majority of the population.

The programme of the PSG is dedicated to the needs of the working class and youth and links them to the programme of socialist revolution. Jobs, education, health care, affordable housing and a dignified old age are fundamental rights that must not be sacrificed on the altar of profit. We support all protests and struggles that assist to increase the combativeness and independence of workers.

This presupposes, however, that such struggles are conducted independently of the unions and all other organizations that defend capitalism and suppress those opposing it. The unions have long since ceased to represent the interests of workers. They represent a bureaucratic apparatus alien and hostile to the working class. Union functionaries are paid royally as co-managers who intimidate and oppress workers. In Germany every sacking, pay cut and plant closure bears the signature of the unions and their works council officials. Most recently the closure of the Opel plant in Bochum was enforced with the support of IG Metall union and central works council.

We advocate the formation of Action Committees in workplaces and neighbourhoods to organize the resistance against plant closures, lay-offs and cuts in social services, and build strong links with workers in other cities and countries.

Against dictatorship and war

The fight against war and the defence of democratic rights occupies a central place in the PSG programme. As was the case 80 years ago, the ruling class today is responding to the deepening social crisis by strengthening the state apparatus and increasing militarism.

Democratic elections have degenerated into a meaningless exercise. Irrespective of the will of the electorate, government policy is determined by the financial markets. The state apparatus is being strengthened throughout Europe in order to suppress social resistance. In Germany, the Federal Constitutional Court has annulled the post-war separation of the police and secret services and legitimized domestic combat missions by the army. The United States is the role model: after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Department of Homeland Security was established as an all-powerful apparatus of surveillance and repression.

The European powers are reacting to the economic crisis by throwing themselves aggressively into the struggle for spheres of influence, markets and resources. France plays a leading role in the new "scramble for Africa", which is aimed primarily at the growing influence of China. It

seized the initiative in the Libyan war and has since forged ahead, sending its own troops to Mali.

After some initial hesitation, Germany is participating ever more aggressively in these imperialist wars. The German army is currently active in more than a dozen international war zones, in order to increasingly realize the aims of German imperialism by military means. Among its priorities is to secure "free trade routes", "a secure supply of raw materials" and "the development, protection of, and access to natural resources, distribution channels and markets", as official defence policy guidelines state. After the US and Russia, Germany is the third largest arms exporter in the world.

European nations are orienting towards American imperialism, which is compensating for its loss of economic power by exploiting its huge military might and deflecting explosive domestic social tensions onto external enemies. Since the beginning of this century, the United States and its allies have fought three major wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, with devastating consequences for their peoples and their society. They are now preparing further wars against Syria and Iran. In order to overthrow the regime of President Assad, allied with Iran, they are stoking up a sectarian civil war in Syria. In so doing they are supporting and arming the same Islamist forces that served as a pretext for the "war on terror".

While preparing another bloodbath in the Middle East, the United States has shifted the focus of its military power to the Asia-Pacific region in order to curb the rise of China. As part of the "pivot to Asia" announced by President Obama, the US is systematically encircling its main economic rivals, arming its regional allies and fomenting territorial conflicts in the South China Sea. The logic of this development leads to a nuclear war that threatens the future of all human civilization. According to a recent study by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), "The Pentagon has started to 'think the unthinkable', a military strategy for a possible victorious war against China".

The danger of a third world war cannot be dispelled by pacifist appeals to imperialist governments. The struggle against imperialist war is inextricably linked to the struggle against its root cause: capitalism. The PSG and the International Committee of the Fourth International fight to unite the international working class in the struggle against the growing threat of war. We are the only political force that systematically opposes the growing danger of war and imperialist aggression in the Middle East, Africa and the Asia-Pacific. Our Australian section, the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), has placed this issue at the centre of its own election campaign.

Militarism and the strengthening of state powers are rejected by the working class, and broad layers of the population. This opposition, however, like the resistance to social cuts, finds no expression in official politics. The Left Party and pseudo-left groups that supported the mass demonstrations against the Iraq war in 2003 are now among the most ardent supporters of a war against Syria. On the eve of World War I, pacifists, trade unions, and large sections of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) swung into the camp of German imperialism; now the Left Party and its pseudo-left satellites are treading the same path.

The building of a new workers' party

At the heart of the election campaign of the PSG is the building of a new workers' party. All those parties that once claimed to represent the interests of workers have moved completely into the camp of the ruling class.

This year, the SPD celebrates the 150th anniversary of its founding. It

would be more appropriate for the SPD to wait one year in order to coincide with the 100th anniversary of its support for the First World War. This better fits with the party's present policies. Current SPD leaders Sigmar Gabriel and Peer Steinbrück have nothing in common with the tradition of SPD leaders August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht, who built a Marxist mass party of the working class. Bebel was convinced that the working class can be educated and elevated to run society; Gabriel and co. think that workers possess no memory and can be taken for fools.

With Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV, the SPD demonstrated it has both feet firmly in the camp of finance capital. Economic globalization has completely undermined the programme of social reforms, which temporarily helped the SPD to power during the economic boom of the post-war period. It now differs not one jot from the other bourgeois parties.

The Greens are a faithful reflection of the 1968 protest generation. In their youth, they rebelled against their fathers and enthused over the liberation of the individual from the constraints of bourgeois society, in which they also included the working class. This was followed by their social advancement and a steady move to the right. Following their entry into the government in 1998, the Greens abandoned their pacifism and the lip service they had paid to social questions. Today they differ only in matters of lifestyle from the pro-business Free Democratic Party (FDP). The average income of their members is the highest of all parties represented in the Bundestag. They support austerity and militarism and criticize the Merkel government from the right for failing to participate in the Libyan war.

The most rotten of all bourgeois parties is the Left Party. There is nothing "left" about it apart from its name. Like the other parties, it supports welfare cuts, the strengthening of the state apparatus and militarism. It defends the European Union, the most important tool of social counter-revolution in Europe. Whenever it has gone into government, it has axed social spending and strengthened the state apparatus. In foreign policy, the Left Party acts as an arm of the Foreign Ministry. In Syria, it works closely with the pro-imperialist opposition. Together with leading members of the SPD, the Greens and the ruling CDU, party chair Katja Kipping has signed a statement calling for imperialist intervention in Syria.

The social phraseology of the Left Party is only used to confuse the working class and prevent an independent socialist movement. In this respect, the Left Party has a long tradition. Its roots lie in the Stalinist state party of the former East Germany, which existed like a parasite on nationalised property and the politically oppressed the working class. They regarded the reintroduction of capitalism as an opportunity to enrich themselves at the expense of the working class. The path to German unity was, in their view, "absolutely necessary and had to be pursued with determination", as the last East German Prime Minister, Hans Modrow, wrote in his memoirs.

In the West the Left Party is based on wily old union bureaucrats and former SPD officials. They quit the SPD and joined forces with the East German Stalinists to prevent resistance to the Hartz laws assuming revolutionary forms. Their stated goal is to help a government of the SPD and the Greens return to power.

Pseudo-left groups such as the Socialist Alternative (SAV) and Marx 21—linked to Britain's Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party, respectively—find the anti-working class policies of the Left Party irresistible and have entered into it. They represent the interests of a wealthy middle class layer that has benefited from the oppression of the working class. Entry into the Left Party has enabled them to become members of parliament and given them access to the considerable financial resources of the Left Party and its Rosa Luxembourg Foundation. They regard the crisis as an opportunity to integrate themselves deeper into the bourgeois state. Within the Left Party, they are

the most aggressive supporters of the right-wing union bureaucracy and imperialist intervention in Syria. These groups are on the other side of the barricades in the class struggle. Workers and youth must not be duped by their "leftist" phraseology: they are political opponents of the working class.

The deep crisis of capitalism and the political bankruptcy of the traditional "left" parties and their pseudo-left followers has enabled right-wing demagogues to steer growing discontent with the social and political crisis into a reactionary, nationalist direction. Behind its vociferous criticism of the political situation, the Five Star Movement of Beppe Grillo in Italy defends a right-wing agenda. The Pirate Party in Germany, hailed by the media as "refreshingly unspoiled" for its apparent naivety and ignorance, also promotes right-wing policies.

The PSG differs in every respect from the corrupt bourgeois parties and their pseudo-left appendages. Our strength lies in our programme, our principles and our unbroken tradition. We represent the continuity of the great revolutionary Marxists—Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, and Rosa Luxemburg. Our international movement, the Left Opposition and the Fourth International, emerged in the course of Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism, which suppressed workers' democracy in the Soviet Union, murdered the leaders of the October Revolution, and was responsible for the greatest defeats of the international working class—including Germany in 1933—before finally destroying the Soviet Union.

The International Committee of the Fourth International has defended the perspective of proletarian internationalism against all those who adapted themselves to the Stalinist and nationalist leaders of the post-war period—from Mao Zedong and Gamal Abdel Nasser, to Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez. We have always insisted that socialism can only be the result of an independent international movement of the working class, rather than the political manoeuvres of "left" bourgeois politicians.

This perspective is confirmed today. The collapse of the Soviet Union and East Germany two decades ago did not represent the failure of socialism, but were the culmination of the Stalinist betrayal of socialism. These events initiated a new era of violent social upheaval. None of the contradictions that plunged Europe into a 30-year period of wars and revolutions a century ago have been resolved. They are all breaking out once again.

A relapse to barbarism and war can only be prevented by the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the PSG as the new revolutionary leadership of the working class. This is the central aim of our election campaign. To this end it is necessary to draw the lessons of the 20th century embodied in the history of the International Committee of the Fourth International. With the *World Socialist Web Site*, the International Committee has an organ, which, based on these lessons, provides a political orientation for the working class every day, read by tens of thousands of workers around the world.

We call on all workers, students, youth, socialist-minded intellectuals and professionals to support the election campaign of the PSG. Read the *World Socialist Web Site*, support our campaign practically and financially, and become a member of the PSG!



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