

Germany: PSG holds meetings in defence of Edward Snowden

Our reporters

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Last week, the Socialist Equality Party (PSG) held meetings in defence of Edward Snowden in Berlin, Bochum and Frankfurt together with the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). All were well attended and were marked by lively discussions.

The PSG is the only political party in Germany to defend the former American intelligence contractor on a principled basis, and oppose the expansive surveillance measures of the United States and its allies against the people, which Snowden uncovered. Although the SPD (Social Democratic Party), Greens, Left Party and Pirate Party have made certain criticisms, they defend the intelligence services and their surveillance of the population, for which these parties are partly responsible.

The demonstrations in Germany held last Saturday by these parties and the FDP (Free Democratic Party) were aimed at covering their own tracks and undermining any genuine opposition to state surveillance and police state measures. Only a few hundred people took part in several cities.

At the PSG's meetings, the discussion was introduced by the party's federal election candidate, Christoph Vandreier. He highlighted the extent of the surveillance which Snowden had uncovered, and spoke about the close collaboration between the American National Security Agency (NSA) and Germany's intelligence services.

"The target of this surveillance machinery is not isolated terrorists, but rather the population as a whole," Vandreier said. "The surveillance is aimed against all social and political opposition."

The extensive spying on the population shows how class tensions in the United States, Europe and around the globe have sharpened. In order to impose deep social attacks and their own self-enrichment, the ruling elite rely to an increasing degree on authoritarian measures.

Growing social polarisation is also the reason why there no longer remains any basis of support for the defence of democratic rights within the ruling class. Former liberal media outlets supported the witch-hunt of Snowden, and all

of the parties represented in parliament had justified spying on the population, Vandreier continued.

"The Left Party has representatives in the most important parliamentary committees, and they defend keeping information secret from the public," Vandreier said, citing several examples from Left Party politicians.

The defence of Snowden and democratic rights is inseparable from the social interests of the working class, Vandreier explained. Only an independent movement of the working population could prevent the imposition of dictatorial measures by the ruling elite and a renewal of barbarism on the European continent. "That is a lesson of history, which was learned through bitter experience here in Germany," he said.

Mass opposition to the attacks on social and democratic rights would undoubtedly develop. The decisive question was, however, that of perspective. Only on the basis of a socialist programme, based on historical experiences could the working class win this fight, the speaker continued. "The ruling elite have built up a massive surveillance system and the apparatus of a police state in order to suppress the population," said Vandreier. "It is high time that workers build their own party which is capable of resisting this apparatus."

The speech triggered animated discussions in all three cities, focusing on specific aspects of the Snowden affair and on questions about a socialist perspective and the building of the PSG.

Berlin

More than 60 workers and students came to the lecture hall at the Technical University last Thursday to discuss the defence of Snowden. After the opening report, there were many contributions from the audience. A young student asked why the issue of building a party was the central

focus, instead of the planning of concrete actions.

“But the Snowden affair shows that we are not just dealing with one or another mistake by politicians,” another participant responded. “Rather, we see how far those in power are prepared to go to hold on to their rule.” A handful of protests were insufficient, what was necessary was a principled response which the PSG was offering with its socialist perspective, the speaker concluded.

Another participant then objected that surveillance not only takes place under capitalism, but had been present in the GDR (East Germany) and the Soviet Union. “How does the PSG explain this and what does it mean for the defence of Snowden?” she asked.

An older worker responded that surveillance and police state measures were always bound up with the rule of a few over the majority. Under Stalinism, a bureaucratic clique governed, which suppressed the working class. “The Fourth International, whose German section is the PSG, emerged out of the defence of socialist principles in opposition to Stalinism.”

Frankfurt

In Frankfurt around 50 people met on Saturday at the Haus der Jugend. After the speech there was a similar discussion on the fundamental questions of a socialist perspective. “Is there still a working class, and who belongs to it?” asked a young student. Others spoke of the “distraction” of the media, which made it more difficult for workers to defend their interests.

Helmut Arens, who chaired the meeting, explained that the working class was defined by its position in the production process. “People are compelled to sell their labour power in order to live,” he said.

Vandreier also noted that class was the fundamental social force in society. Society is characterised by objective social contradictions, which had to be understood as the basis for revolutionary politics, he stated. The opposition of workers arises from these contradictions. It was essential that the workers be armed with a revolutionary programme based on a scientific understanding of history and society, he added.

The discussion continued long after the formal meeting ended. At the book stall and throughout the hall lively discussions developed, and many gave donations to the collection for the campaign to defend Edward Snowden.

Several participants stated their readiness to help out actively. “Snowden has thrown up many questions which are in no way new,” said Nadja, a high school graduate from

Darmstadt. “People actually know a lot about the system in which we live. It is necessary to draw the conclusions and take action.”

Bochum

In Bochum, where around 30 people came together on Wednesday, a young steelworker from Mülheim spoke up. Florian had read the WSWS for several years.

Following the meeting, he said that Snowden, who is the same age as him, was a hero. “It concerns me that everyone is trying to discredit him. I also read so-called left blogs from the United States. They are no different to the bourgeois media. They defend Obama and the US state, although Obama has shown that he is trampling on social and democratic rights. You are the only ones who genuinely defend Snowden and democratic rights on a principled basis.”

Jacqueline, who studies in Bochum, learnt of the meeting from placards and flyers. She had followed the WSWS for some time. She said, “Edward Snowden is a hero, because he was brave enough to publish the information he had about the activities of the intelligence services.”

“It is crazy that the intelligence services who have committed crimes are not punished, and those who uncover them are pursued and threatened with death,” she said. To a question on the position of the media, she replied, “On television and in the newspapers there is already much less reporting about Snowden, and if it is reported, the activities of the government and intelligence services are hardly criticised. There is almost nothing heard about Bradley Manning any more. With the WSWS it is different. It defends Snowden, Manning and Julian Assange on principle.”

The meeting was a further reason for her to intensify her focus on the WSWS as well as the programme and perspective of the PSG, she stated.



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