

German television broadcasts hostile and distorted reports on the SEP election campaign

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Previous television coverage of election campaigns conducted by the Socialist Equality Party (*Partei für Soziale Gleichheit*, PSG) have often been one-sided and misleading. In their reports on the PSG in the current election, however, reporters have gone even further and blatantly violated basic journalistic obligations to provide objective coverage.

In its broadcast, the ARD television channel openly attacked the Trotskyist programme of the PSG, claiming it differed only in “nuances” from the Stalinist terror. Germany’s second major public channel, the ZDF, broadcast the remark of a passerby filmed in a different place, whose televised remarks were evidently addressed to another party.

First of all, the facts: As broadcasting stations dependent on substantial fees paid by the public, both the ARD and ZDF channels are obliged by law to provide unbiased information. While the federal parties currently represented in parliament are afforded repeated TV coverage at peak viewing times, however, the 28 parties standing without representation in the Bundestag were preemptorily dealt with in one 90-minute programme broadcast at midnight. The documentary, “Election 2013—The Battle of the Small Ones,” was broadcast on ARD on Monday night at 23:00 and ended at 0:30.

The PSG was featured shortly after midnight. The ARD began its commentary by summing up the programme of the PSG with the words, “Trotsky yes, all others no.” Trotsky is revered in the manner of an icon as “the only true saviour”, according to this account. The Trotskyist view of the world is repeated “again and again” in the form of a mantra, the commentary continued.

At the end of the nearly three-minute presentation, the programme declared: “The subtle differences between Trotsky, Marx, Lenin and Stalin are barely discernible for outsiders. But for the officials of the PSG’s ‘special communism’ these nuances are fundamental and insurmountable.”

Such allegations, claiming that all that separated Trotsky and Stalin were “subtle differences” and the conflict between the Left Opposition and the Stalinist terror was based on obscure interpretations of the same policy, are a grotesque distortion of history. How would one respond, for example, if it were claimed that the differences of opinion between Hitler and Roosevelt were only slight, and hard to understand?

Alongside Hitler, Stalin was the biggest mass murderer of the twentieth century. It is no coincidence that he organised his genocide of an entire generation of Marxist revolutionaries in the name of the struggle against Trotskyism. In the four Moscow trials from 1936 to 1938, almost all the leaders of the Bolshevik Party and close associates of Lenin were condemned and executed on the basis of false charges.

With even a brief glimpse at the German Wikipedia website, the ARD reporter could have read: “In these trials, the main accused person was Leon Trotsky (who was not present), the former chairman of the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, which had led the Soviets in the taking of power on November 7, 1917.” In the subsequent Stalinist purges hundreds of thousands of socialist intellectuals and workers were deported to the Gulag and countless murdered.

Why does the ARD deny this fundamental gulf, this river of blood between Stalinism and Trotskyism? The

editor responsible for the programme, Andreas Neumann, is an experienced journalist who has been active at Radio Bremen as an editor, reporter or presenter for 20 years. Apparently, he is so closely associated with the social-democratic milieu in Bremen that he feels compelled to regurgitate the most discredited lie of the twentieth century—i.e., that the Stalinist dictatorship had something to do with socialism.

Neumann is so outraged by the PSG's emphasis on the political significance of Trotsky that he confuses dates and in his short three-minute commentary refers to Trotsky's assassination as having taken place 75 years ago. No, Mr. Neumann, Trotsky was not murdered 75 years ago, Rather, 1938 marks the date of the foundation of the Fourth International. The founding programme of the new international party began with the words: "The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat." This fundamental and still very relevant assessment was based on Trotsky's assessment of the lessons flowing from the German catastrophe of 1933.

It may be that political ignorance is especially pronounced in the editorial office of Radio Bremen, but the following is widely known: Trotsky's struggle for a united front—i.e., a common front between workers organised in the Communist (KPD) and Social Democratic Parties—was of crucial significance at the beginning of the 1930s. While the Social Democrats were propagating anti-communist propaganda and supported Hindenburg (who later appointed Hitler chancellor of the Reich), the KPD described the Social Democrats as social fascists, and the union leadership (ADGB) called in 1933 for a joint May Day demonstration with the Nazi NSDAP. Only Trotsky and his followers had a clear political perspective to fight fascism.

Today, 80 years later, no one can ignore these historical facts. Hitler's victory was made possible by the splitting of the labour movement and the shameful betrayals of the social democratic, Stalinist and trade union leaders. The consequences of this continue to be felt today.

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Andreas Neumann and his team of reporters are

enraged by the PSG's political intransigence against other parties, especially the Left Party. All other parties, he reports, are, in the eyes of the PSG, "corrupt and bourgeois or Stalinist, as are all the other left-wing groups." This is very true! One should add that the media, with the ARD and ZDF at the forefront, are also part of this all-party front, ranging from the far right to the "far left".

There is growing popular resistance to this closing of ranks between the parties, which all agree on social cuts and the restriction of democratic rights, just as they agree on the preparations for war against Syria. The current campaign of the PSG is aimed at giving this popular resistance a voice and a clear socialist orientation.

As for the ZDF, its broadcast showed little interest in the election statements produced by the PSG. Instead, the ZDF reporters sought to collect negative views from passersby. It is apparent that the reporters were unable to find what they wanted at the PSG information table set up in the Berlin district of Neukölln. Instead, they contrived to include in their film a negative statement from someone else who had nothing to do with the PSG information table. In the scene, one can clearly see the World Clock, which is located in a completely different part of the city. Apparently this passerby was expressing an opinion on another party in a different place.

This is a major falsification of the PSG campaign and flouts basic journalistic standards.

The postings can be viewed at the library of the ARD (PSG from 1:04:45) and ZDF (PSG from 1:00). The full interviews, recorded by a film crew of the PSG (with English subtitles) can be found here. (English subtitles can be activated by pressing the "CC" box at the bottom right of the video.)



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