

European workers' conference against war, dictatorship and social cuts in Berlin

Our correspondents
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On September 21, the Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, PSG) concluded its election campaign for the federal parliament (Bundestag) and state parliament in Hesse with a European workers' conference in Berlin. Representatives of the PSG's sister parties in Britain and the United States were also present. The conference received greetings from France, Romania and Russia.

It was the high point of an intensive campaign lasting several weeks at job centres, factories, schools and universities, and for the first time a series of meetings that could be followed online.

There was no 'election campaign' in the conventional sense, but rather an electoral alliance between all of the parties," said PSG chairman Ulrich Rippert at the beginning of the meeting. All of the parties had sought to get into bed with Chancellor Angela Merkel, and had declared their sense of responsibility and reliability to the banks and financial elite. The Left Party was "part of this cartel." The more the Social Democrats (SPD) moved to the right, the more the Left Party offered to form a governing coalition with them.

Behind the unity of all the parties was the preparation of massive attacks on the social and democratic rights of workers after the election, Ulrich Rippert continued. Germany's seemingly stable economy, which had been conjured up over recent weeks, was now being drawn into the European crisis, and the ruling class was planning a surprise attack on all of the remaining social achievements.

"Regardless of who wins the election tomorrow, and regardless of the composition of the new government, it will be a government which declares war on the working class," he said. It was the role of the Left Party in this situation to keep all opposition among the population under control. This was how the declaration on their election placards read "Revolution? No," should be understood.

"The social counterrevolution is connected with the return of German great power politics," explained Rippert. The media above all had beaten the drum for war against Syria in the weeks before the election, he stated. As an example, this was shown after the temporary postponement of the war against Syria by *Die Zeit* editor Josef Joffe's rant against "Obama's mini war." "Such a pro-war media campaign has not been seen in this country since the media demanded Germany's drive for world power one hundred years ago, and since Hugenberg organised the Nazis war propaganda," Rippert stated.

Against this background, the PSG's campaign was an important step forward. "The PSG is the only party to oppose the whole political establishment. The political polarisation—on one side, all of the established parties from left to right and the trade unions, and on the other, our party with an internationalist and socialist programme—was very apparent. An independent development of the working class is closely bound up with the building of the Socialist Equality Party as part of the International Committee of the Fourth International."

The United Socialist States of Europe

"If the federal elections of September 22 were really democratic, then all European residents would be able to take part in them," noted Peter Schwarz, editor of the German *World Socialist Web Site* and secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International, in his contribution. "The decisions which will be taken in Berlin affect the lives of millions of Europeans. The German government is the driving force behind the austerity programmes which have forced broad sections of the population across Europe into poverty and driven up unemployment figures to record levels."

In fact, not only were European workers excluded from the political decisions in Germany, but conversely German workers were cut off from European policy. An important indication of the all-party coalition in the election campaign was that "Europe was not spoken about," he said.

"And yet the mutual dependence and integration of Europe was never so great as today, both economically and politically," Schwarz stated, citing figures showing the extreme dependence of Germany on the European market for economic exports. While the previous three German governments had concentrated on confining the crisis to the countries of southern and eastern Europe, the relative stability of European capitalism after the Second World War had ended. "The continent threatens to break up once again into rival powers," he added.

Schwarz continued by saying that the banks and major concerns had profited from these policies, as had a privileged section of the middle class. All of the parties had stood for the interests of these layers in the election campaign. By contrast, a large proportion of the population had been affected by low wages and poverty since the Agenda 2010 policies. "Germany is one of the most deeply socially polarised countries in Europe. Six million living on Hartz IV welfare benefits confront one million millionaires," he said.

In the face of conflicts over austerity programmes and shrinking markets, "The European powers are increasingly turning to military methods," Schwarz stated. He cited from the defence policy of the German government, in which the struggle for raw materials and energy resources is identified as a task for future interventions of the German army. This was the reason for the aggressive emergence of French imperialism in Libya, Mali and Syria, as well as the increasing militarism of German imperialism. At the same time, sections of the bourgeoisie were supporting right-wing parties and openly fascist groups in Europe.

"However the European working class has not yet had its last word, not even its first word," Schwarz said in conclusion. It would be forced into class struggles and would orient itself increasingly towards the analysis of the *World Socialist Web Site*. The answer to the European crisis, nationalism and the danger of war was the programme of the United Socialist States of Europe, he stated.

Pseudo-Left support attack on Syria

Chris Marsden, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Britain, spoke on the decision of Britain's parliament to refuse to support the Cameron government in a military attack on Syria on August 29. Along with strategic considerations, the cause for this could be found in the overwhelming opposition to war among the population.

"After the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, no one anymore believes the 'humanitarian' lies or the claims about the use of chemical weapons with which the government wanted to justify its support for the war," he said. Ruling circles also feared that the war would have provoked even greater mass resistance than in 2003 against then Labour Party leader Tony Blair, which could become the spark for the widespread, but as yet unarticulated anger at brutal social cuts.

The decision by parliament was celebrated by pseudo-left forces, Marsden reported, who are supporters of an attack on Syria. Gilbert Achcar, a leading Pabloite in Britain, declared that the Conservative government was a "rare case, in which the leadership of a Western imperial nation takes parliamentary democracy seriously," defending the United Nations at the same time. In the next breath, Achcar complained that the United States and its European allies had not done enough to arm the Syrian opposition.

"That is not an anti-war declaration, but rather a call for a more effective proxy war led by pro-Western forces," Marsden stated. "The entire fraternity of pseudo-left groups support the imperialist intervention in Syria with no ifs or buts, as was already the case in Libya. They act solely as advisers and defenders of the ruling class. There is not an anti-war movement worthy of the name in Europe or any other country. The people who present themselves as part of this are political scoundrels whose only task is to prevent the working class from breaking from the representatives of the bourgeoisie, that is with the Labour Party in Britain or the Left Party here in Germany."

Johannes Stern, reporter for the WSW on the Middle East, focused on these questions and explained that the outbreak of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions had "introduced a new stage in the world socialist revolution." Twenty years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, "the working class returned with its full power as a revolutionary force," he said.

However, the central problem was the crisis of revolutionary leadership. The question as to why, after the overthrow of Mubarak, another military government had been able to take power could not be separated from the pseudo-left tendencies that were supported by the Left Party. Stern cited a paper from the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, which is close to the Left Party, which spoke out openly against democracy in Egypt and in favour of the current military dictatorship.

The pseudo-left played a decisive role in both the Libyan and Syrian wars, Stern continued. The Syrian dissident Michel Kilo, who works closely with the Left Party and whose group now heads the Syrian National Coalition, is one of the strongest supporters of an American military attack. On this issue, Stern stated, "In the Syrian war the Left Party works as an extended arm of the German foreign ministry and has systematically built up the pro-Western Syrian opposition."

The revolutionary leadership of the working class

"This election has taken place against the backdrop of massive war preparations against Syria, and behind that stands Iran," said David North, chairman of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States and WSW

International Editorial Board chairman. "The only thing which has prevented the attack so far was the huge opposition within the population, and that completely took the governments by surprise." The artificially created "public opinion" which surrounds official politics had not enabled them to see what the population really thought, and this had now collided with real public opinion.

This had been shown by the decision of the British parliament not to participate in a military attack on Syria, which had provoked a deep crisis in the Obama administration. But the representatives in Congress and the government had also come under increasing pressure in the United States. According to opinion polls, opposition was running at 9 to 1 against the war. It was clear to many that the propaganda about the use of chemical weapons was a lie, North said.

The American political establishment displayed a tremendous degree of dishonesty, North stated. On July 25, Secretary of State John Kerry had met with representatives of the Islamist opposition in New York, at a time when they feared defeat in the war against Assad. Three weeks thereafter came the poison gas attack. "Why would Assad employ chemical weapons under these conditions, when he was in the process of winning?" North asked.

In this context, North cited testimony from Kerry in the 1970s to a Senate committee, when he was a member of a Vietnam War veterans' group. Kerry described the brutal murders and mutilations which American soldiers practiced against the Vietnamese. "Kerry is familiar with the crimes of America around the world, for which no one has ever apologised or been held to account. America can hardly rely on its moral authority against Assad. It used chemical weapons such as Agent Orange against Vietnam, as well as white phosphorus later against Iraq."

The new situation with the postponement of the attack on Syria was not clear to the majority of the population, North continued. The immediate fear of war had temporarily eased. But there had also been similar situations prior to the First and Second World Wars, he warned. After the Munich agreement in 1938, it was also said that the war threat had been averted. "However, it is the deeply rooted contradictions of the capitalist system which produce war, not the actions of individual politicians." Twelve months after the Munich agreement, the Second World War broke out nonetheless.

The most important question was the role of the working class and its revolutionary leadership, North said. "This year there is a series of significant anniversaries in the history of the workers' movement: 165 years since the Communist Manifesto, 150 years since the founding of the SPD, and 100 years since the death of August Bebel. But it is also the 90th anniversary of a decisive event: the defeat of the German revolution without a fight in October 1923."

In "Lessons of October," Leon Trotsky analysed this event in relation to the events of 1917 and demonstrated the significance of the preparation of the revolution by a party that struggles against petty-bourgeois opportunist tendencies. His analysis had been confirmed in a negative sense in Germany, where the Communist Party was not prepared and called the uprising off at the last minute, North explained.

The founding of the Fourth International was also prepared through a struggle against such tendencies, North stated, in particular against standpoints represented by the centrist SAP (Socialist Workers Party) of which Willy Brandt was a leading member.

He discussed the history of the Fourth International after the war and noted, "One hundred years ago the workers' movement split on the eve of the war. Today we see how one supposedly socialist tendency after the other passes into the camp of imperialist politics. In the Transitional Programme from 1938 it states that outside of the cadre of the Fourth International, there is not a single revolutionary tendency worthy of the name. Today we can say that the International Committee of the Fourth International is the only tendency that fights for the programme of

socialist revolution. In recent weeks, the PSG has analysed the crisis and was the only party to tell workers the truth. This is the party which represents the historical interests of the working class.”



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