

Over 4,000 signatures support German Socialist Equality Party for European elections

Our correspondents
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Last Friday, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party) handed in 4,362 signatures supporting its participation in the European elections on 25 May to the federal elections board in Wiesbaden. Each signature had to be presented on an official form with details of their full address which had to be verified by the relevant residents office.

With the presentation of the signatures, the PSG has overcome an important hurdle to its participation in the elections.

Together with its sister party in Britain, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the PSG is standing in the European elections on 25 May. The two sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) are the only parties in Europe fighting from the standpoint of the working class against the European Union (EU), and for the United Socialist States of Europe.

As it states in the joint election statement, the aim of the PSG and SEP in participating in the election is the unification of working people in a struggle for a socialist society. They intend to build sections of the ICFI throughout Europe.

PSG election teams collected the required signatures in Berlin, Leipzig, Frankfurt and across the Ruhr region. At job centres and universities, in shopping centres and at auto plants like Daimler in Stuttgart, GM/Opel in Bochum and Rüsselsheim, and BMW in Leipzig, they led numerous discussions and distributed thousands of copies of the election statement.

Hundreds of signatures were collected among university students in Berlin, who supported the party in its campaign to defend Leon Trotsky. The campaign was directed against the appearance of Robert Service,

the author of a miserable biography of Trotsky, who was invited to the Humboldt University by Professor Jörg Baberowski of the department for eastern European history.

In discussions, PSG members referred to the attempts to re-write history and transform the university in to a right-wing think tank. This was closely connected to the preparation of new military interventions by the German government and the EU. The situation in Ukraine is currently intensifying.

At the Goethe University in Frankfurt, an election team collected over 60 signatures during just one lunch break. Students took the election statement in to the canteen, read it while they ate, and signed on their return. “Parties and elections don’t really achieve anything,” one said. “But if you intend to create revolutionary consciousness, then you have my vote.”

The PSG election teams often met spontaneous opposition to the EU, which is associated with increasing impoverishment in large parts of Europe and the growing danger of war. A worker from Bosnia, who has lived and worked in Frankfurt for years, spoke about the catastrophe in his home country left behind by the Balkan war, saying, “Dictator Milosevic was the subject here for some time, but the way things are for us today, no-one is interested in that any more.” Social conditions for the population in the Balkans had been significantly better prior to the partition of Yugoslavia. “Where is the upturn that we were promised at that time?” he asked.

Many workers oppose the European Parliament and all parties represented in it. The dishonesty of the Left Party, its constant offers to cooperate with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and its support for the grand

coalition and the EU provoked a lot of discussion. There was significant support for the PSG's position that the struggle against the EU could not be left to the right-wing, and that a new socialist, working class party had to be built throughout Europe.

At job centres the election teams came face to face with the consequences of stark social polarisation. Twelve years after the introduction of the Hartz IV welfare reforms, low-wage jobs and precarious working conditions determine the lives of numerous working class families. Many people don't know how they will make it to the end of the month. A married couple who signed in Frankfurt, reported that it took four jobs between them to make ends meet with their four children. "It is a never-ending struggle. Although we don't want it, our lives and those of our children are dominated by constant uncertainty."

An Indian with a German passport complained bitterly that "every time there is a conflict over child benefit." But also the workers at the job centres reported that the pressure on them had drastically increased and the backlogs were growing because jobs in the offices were being eliminated uninterruptedly.

The PSG won over 50 signatures at the gates of the GM/Opel plant in Rüsselsheim, 34 alone at one shift change in January.

At the same time, they distributed the PSG's autoworkers newsletter, which uncovered the despicable role of Opel's works council and the IG Metall trade union in the closure of the GM/Opel plant in Bochum.

Workers in Rüsselsheim are watching developments in Bochum with growing concern. The Bochum plant is to be closed at the end of 2014, resulting in the loss of the livelihoods of 3,300 Opel workers and thousands more in the supply industry.

The plant shutdown is part of a plan to make Opel competitive in the global market once again. Karl-Thomas Neumann, the new Opel chief, intends to make the German business profitable by 2016. The pressure on workers in the remaining plants in Rüsselsheim, Eisenach, Kaiserslautern and Gleiwitz will therefore be steadily increased. In this process, IG Metall and the works council work hand in hand with company management.

As the PSG explain, jobs, wages and social achievements can only now be defended independently

of and in opposition to the trade unions. The unions have long since ceased to be workers organisations, but instead play the role of junior partner in the company. The workers know that IG Metall cooperated in the organisation of the shutdown of Bochum.

"Bochum: that's bad news, for us as well," said a worker on the early shift. "The trade union is no better here. I'm no longer an IG Metall member." And another said, "IG Metall isn't what it once was."

"After Bochum it will be Rüsselsheim's turn," said a third worker, referring to the massive increase in pressure on the workers in the Rüsselsheim plant.

Several workers reported that the assembly lines are again running faster in Rüsselsheim: instead of 55 vehicles per hour as previously, since January 2014 60 per hour have been produced. In protest against this, workers have stopped work on several occasions. While production was reduced in Bochum, temporary workers were hired who could be got rid of quickly in an emergency, and Opel workers from the Polish plant in Gleiwitz were employed for €800 (\$1,109) per month.

With their help, production was massively increased in the short term. A worker explained that at the beginning of December, between 30 and 40 temporary workers were hired in his department.

A young contract worker on the assembly line, who gave his signature in support of the PSG's candidature, confirmed the scale of the speed-up. He said, "I am constantly under pressure and have to really rush to manage the work. I am always totally worn out and sweating, so I am delighted when after 70 minutes there is a break for a few moments."



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