

PSG holds European election rally at Alexanderplatz in Berlin

Our correspondents**14 May 2014**

Last Saturday, the Socialist Equality Party in Germany (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, PSG) held a rally at Alexanderplatz in Berlin as part of its European election campaign, attracting many passersby and tourists. As at smaller rallies organised in the working class districts of Wedding and Neuköln in recent days, a large number of people listened carefully to the speeches from the candidates and read the PSG's election statement, "Fight against war, vote PSG!"

"We are the only party that is focusing on the struggle against war and militarism in the European elections," declared lead candidate Ulrich Rippert, who called for the transformation of "the election on May 25 into a referendum against war." Rippert pointed to the shocking events in eastern Ukraine and above all in Odessa, where a fascist massacre was carried out.

He charged the German government with being chiefly responsible. They were using the crisis in Ukraine for a massive rearming of the German army and NATO and had the support of all parties in parliament. Leading the way was the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the party of the Hartz IV social welfare reforms, which had assumed the role of enforcer on the issue of militarism and was only being outdone by the Greens. The Left Party had also abandoned its pacifist façade. "The German government is systematically intensifying the confrontation with Russia and has accepted the possibility of a nuclear catastrophe. All parties support the war course—not us! We say: not again, two world wars are enough," Rippert stated.

The media campaign had turned reality on its head and portrayed Russia as the aggressor. "It is as always: it begins with lies and ends in catastrophe." In reality, the Merkel government had together with the US brought a right-wing anti-Russian regime to power in Kiev in February, working with fascist parties and militant groups. It was precisely this that provoked the conflict in Crimea and now in eastern Ukraine. Behind these dangerous provocations against Russia lies the deep crisis of capitalism.

"Those in power in Kiev intend to implement a programme of shock therapy imposed by the IMF and EU and have already announced massive wage and pension cuts," Rippert said. "Miners in eastern Ukraine went on strike against this."

The PSG had taken on the task, along with its sister parties internationally, of mobilising the working class on a socialist

perspective, Rippert continued. "The reason for the revival of militarism—as in 1914 and 1939—is the insoluble crisis of capitalism," Rippert explained. "Therefore, the struggle against war has to be combined with the fight against its cause in capitalism and its profit system."

Christoph Vandreier, who is also a PSG candidate for the European elections, concentrated his remarks on the policies of social devastation in the European Union (EU), which have been enforced by the Merkel government. "The war abroad is connected with a war at home," Vandreier said. "In order to finance rearming and increase the profits of the banks and concerns, all of the social rights of the working class are being attacked."

Greece serves "for the ruling elite as a role model in this respect," he said. Since 2010, wages in Greece had dropped by an average of 50 percent, and almost a third of adults and two thirds of young people were unemployed, Vandreier added. Forty percent of workers had been cut out of the health care system. "On the streets of Athens, one can see starving children and people who are dying from treatable diseases because they are no longer able to pay for their medicine," Vandreier stated. This was the programme that the German government intends to impose throughout Europe and also in Germany.

"The EU is the instrument of the banks and corporations. It stands for social destruction and militarism," Vandreier declared. The EU had not united the continent, but rather deepened its divisions. "The PSG therefore struggles for the unification of Europe from below, on a socialist basis."

Sven Heymanns spoke as a representative of the PSG's student and youth organisation, the IYSSE, about the connection between attacks on democratic rights and militarist policies. The media campaign was meeting with significant opposition from the population, and the editors were receiving sackfuls of protest letters against their war-mongering, said Heymanns. "Confronted with this view, a war against Russia cannot be carried through via democratic means."

It was now becoming clear why the US, Germany and others had built up a massive intelligence apparatus over the past period. Heymanns said: "It doesn't serve the so-called war on terror, but rather the surveillance of the world population and the suppression of all social and political opposition. The

actions against Edward Snowden, Julian Assange and Bradley Manning show the sorts of measures that the ruling class is prepared to use."

The framework of a police state also exists in Germany, he continued. The German government collaborates with the NSA and other intelligence agencies, with the support of all parties, including the Greens and Left Party, who sit on all the committees and ensure the seamless work of the security apparatus. Therefore, the defence of democratic rights required the building of the PSG, Heymanns stated.

Many who listened to the rally backed the PSG's antiwar campaign. Along with participants from Berlin, tourists from other cities and European countries joined in. "Everyone in France is also against this militarist policy," an elderly French married couple reported. The media in France were falsifying the facts in the same way, and all the parties were demanding sanctions and a military build-up, including the Communist Party, the couple reported. They expressed their satisfaction that they had found a party in Germany that was standing against war and for a united movement of European workers in opposition to this development.

Many discussions focused on the question of how it was that the German government was suddenly coming out in favour of militarism against Russia. Generally, over the recent period, it had been the US government that had instigated wars, such as in Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and more recently, almost started one in Syria. A Berlin-based technician, who travels a lot for his job to other countries, made the connection with the financial crisis of 2008, which is still unresolved after five years. The preparations for war were a response to the economic crisis, just as the First World War had been a century ago, he commented.

Numerous participants expressed considerable outrage at the cooperation of the US and German governments with Ukrainian fascists.

A young mother from Odessa commented that her friends and relatives there had protested against the Kiev government. "They are not terrorists," she said. The horrific events at the trade union building had been provoked by right-wing forces, and the claim that pro-Russian activists had escalated the situation was a lie, she added. Her grandparents had told her how ordinary people rushed to the trade union building, whether young, 50 years old or 75 years old, women and children. They wanted to push back the extreme right, who had come from Kiev with football thugs.

A Greek neurologist, Nikolaos G. from Thessaloniki, was impressed that the speakers not only attacked the military provocations in Ukraine, but also the growing social misery produced by the EU's austerity policies in many countries.

He told the WSWS about the terrible impact of these policies in Greek hospitals, where medical care has collapsed. "We cannot accept that the market controls our lives. Ultimately we are human," he said angrily. "We were trained as doctors to

help patients, but we don't have the means for that." Seventy years ago, the Greek population suffered under the Nazi occupation, and today it was suffering again under the policies of the German government, he stated.

Many who attended the rally were surprised at the Left Party taking a stance against Russia, as it had always sought to portray itself as an antiwar party. The fact that five deputies had voted for the first time in favour of a German army mission in the Mediterranean to destroy Syrian chemical weapons was news to many passers-by and led to lively debates about the deceitful role of the Left Party, which was abandoning its pacifist phrases at the point where German militarism is reemerging.

PSG participants explained the origins of the Left Party in the former GDR (East Germany), the responsibility of the Stalinist bureaucracy for the reintroduction of capitalism in eastern Germany, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the catastrophic social consequences. The fact that the PSG was the only party in the European election campaigning against war encouraged many to familiarise themselves with the history of the Trotskyist movement and its struggle against Stalinism.

Beate J., who came alone to the rally at Alexanderplatz and listened to the speeches until the end, said that she had not been political before, but she had voted for the PSG in the federal elections because "I couldn't vote for the other parties." She had lost her job and has to live currently from Hartz IV welfare benefits.

She was very concerned about the growing threat of war. With the events in Odessa last week, she immediately had the feeling that the governments are actually preparing for war, despite recognition that war is not wanted. Through the media campaign and its falsification of the facts, "the population is being prepared ideologically for a war, like it was prior to the First and Second World Wars," she said.



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