

Social Democrats outnumbered by opponents at Berlin rally

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The main European election rally of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) at Berlin's central Alexanderplatz on Monday was a truly bizarre event.

In the 1970s, and even into the 1990s, the party was able to mobilise tens of thousands of people for its central meetings in Berlin, the seat of its party headquarters. For its main meeting in the German capital in the run-up to the European elections this coming Sunday the SPD could only rally a group of no more than 300, mostly elderly SPD supporters and union officials, seated on benches in front of the rostrum. This group looked around anxiously at the far greater crowd bearing protest placards behind them, which greeted the SPD speakers with hostility and a chorus of boos.

The SPD had assembled an array of leading members for the open-air event, including Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier; Social Democratic candidate for the post of European Commission President Martin Schulz; the Governing Mayor of Berlin Klaus Wowereit; Berlin candidate Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann; and the Berlin State President Jan Stöß, plus a band, in a vain attempt to attract young people.

There were tumultuous scenes following the speech by Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann, who sat in the European parliament for the Left Party until 2009 before switching to the SPD. She was greeted with boos when she claimed that the SPD wanted to ensure that "Europe is not perceived merely as the representative of business interests".

The visibly nervous Berlin SPD president Jan Stöß evoked the fall of the Berlin Wall over twenty years ago, when the SPD held a rally of 25,000 on the Alexanderplatz. Now, he claimed, in agitated fashion, the SPD must ensure that Nazis and—with a glimpse at the hostile crowd—"other spinners are kept out of the

European Parliament".

Wowereit cynically noted that the hostile reaction and booing that his presence provoked was evidence that the issue of Europe could arouse passions.

When Steinmeier stepped up to the lectern he was greeted with cries of "warmonger", referring to his role in Ukraine and his aggressive stance against Russia. The minister quickly dropped his crooked, made-for-TV smile and denounced the demonstrators as right-wing extremists and "rowdies" intent on "destroying Europe".

There are "still people who do not understand Europe", Steinmeier called out to a chorus of jeering. The SPD, however, according to Steinmeier, confronted "the biggest foreign policy challenge in the 100 years since the First World War and the 75 years since the Second World War". The "ghosts of the Cold War, presumed dead", had returned. It was necessary, he continued, to stand together in Europe and show self-confidence and strength in the economic crisis.

Steinmeier's speech basically recalled his message to the Munich Security Conference in January, when, in unison with Defence Minister von der Leyen and President Gauck, he announced "the end of military restraint" due to the new challenges facing Germany.

The result is well known: since the coup in Kiev on February 22 Steinmeier, along with representatives of the Obama administration, has become one of the permanent advisers to the unelected Yatsenyuk government and its fascist ministers who are now seeking to provoke a bloody civil war.

Steinmeier also raised the Ukraine crisis to advance German militarism. Since May, Steinmeier's Foreign Office has been propagating the necessity for German leadership in Europe. One contribution on the ministry's new website is entitled: "Germany's

assignment: leading Europe in order to lead the world”.

After Steinmeier’s contribution the social-democratic campaign manager sought to give a boost to the next speaker, European Parliament President Martin Schulz. Young cheerleaders sought to inject a bit of life into the docile rows of SPD supporters, as is the usual practice in American elections.

Beforehand, Young Socialist functionaries distributed Martin Schulz posters among the protesters and tried to whip up a bit of applause for the speakers from behind the crowd of demonstrators all to no avail.

In his speech Schulz tried to play down the role of the SPD in implementing the EU’s brutal austerity policies. In a performance that convinced no one, he shed crocodile tears over high youth unemployment in countries like Greece, Spain and Portugal, and the exploitation of women, and even criticized greedy bankers and speculators who had enriched themselves via EU bailout packages.

Many listeners could hardly believe their ears. After all, it was the SPD in government that took all the decisions relating both to the bank bailouts and the austerity programs imposed in Greece, Spain, Portugal and other countries.

Passersby at the outskirts of the rally discussed with supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (PSG), and expressed their disgust with the war policy of the SPD and all the other parliamentary parties. Over a thousand copies of “Fight War, vote PSG!” were distributed. “Nobody takes the SPD seriously anymore”, declared one worker, who said he had previously voted for the SPD but would never do so again.

The rally made one thing absolutely clear: What was formerly a mass party is today nothing other than an exclusive club of careerists, state bureaucrats and union officials which has severed any links to the broad masses of the population. It is a right-wing party of government, which has long since lost the ability to cover up its aggressive imperialist foreign policies and extreme anti-worker policies at home with a few anodyne phrases about social justice.



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