

The Socialist Equality Party of Germany reviews the lessons of Greece

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The Socialist Equality Party of Germany (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit - PSG) held a successful series of meetings with the title “Solidarity with the Greek workers! Fight against the demands of Schäuble and Merkel!” in Leipzig and Bochum, with a final meeting in Frankfurt last Sunday.

Peter Schwarz, secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and head of the German editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, gave an introductory report at the meeting in Frankfurt. He focused on two questions: the brutal austerity measures that the German government and the European Union have imposed on Greece and the role of Syriza.

Schwarz said that the behavior of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Finance Minister Schäuble recalls the darkest chapter in German history and the occupation of Greece by the Nazis during the Second World War. The living standards of the population have declined by 40 percent in the past five years as a consequence of austerity measures, three million people live without health care and 300,000 households have no income at all. Seventeen percent of the population is no longer in a position to get enough to eat each day. Social infrastructure has collapsed.

Schwarz insisted that one cannot simply explain this criminal policy as a consequence of the bad intentions of Schäuble and Merkel. “Rather, one must understand their aggressive behavior toward Greece in terms of the contradictions of world capitalism. Seventy years after the defeat of the Nazis, all the historical questions that the German ruling elite tried to solve in 1914 and 1939 with two world wars are emerging once again,” he stated.

He drew a parallel with the current refugee crisis. The pictures of drowned and suffocated refugees and desperate families behind barbed wire also recall the crimes of the previous century. The refugee crisis is no more the consequence of a natural catastrophe than the collapse of Greece. Schwarz stressed that it is the result of the imperialist wars that the US, Germany and other great powers have carried out in the past twenty years in the

Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and other countries.

When Chancellor Angela Merkel and head of the EU Commission Jean-Claude Juncker express sympathy for the refugees, this is pure hypocrisy, said Schwarz stressing that it is they who are responsible for the crisis. “Capitalist society has nothing more to offer the majority of the population besides social cuts, misery and war. This is what is behind the wave of eagerness to help in Germany and other countries. Many people sense instinctively that the fate of the refugees is also about them.”

Schwarz gave a short historical overview to show why German imperialism behaved so aggressively under Kaiser Wilhelm and Hitler. It was, in Trotsky's words, “the most advanced capitalist country under the conditions of European hopelessness.” Germany is once again confronted with all the same problems. This is the reason why representatives of the government and media are raising demands for German hegemony in Europe and a greater role for Germany in world politics.

Schwarz recommended the book *Scholarship or War Propaganda*, recently published by Mehring Verlag. It explains “why the ruling elite in Germany is giving up its foreign policy restraint, arming the military, intervening worldwide and emerging as the ‘taskmaster’ of the European Union.”

Germany's austerity demands in Greece must be seen in this context, Schwarz said. Their purpose is to defend German hegemony in Europe and to set an example for the treatment of all of Europe and the workers within Germany as well. The most recent ban on the pilot strike at Lufthansa demonstrates that the workers in Germany are already the target of significant attacks.

Syriza's Betrayal

“It is difficult to find a historical example of such a cowardly and miserable betrayal as that perpetrated by Tsipras and his government,” Schwarz continued.

On January 25, Syriza won the election with the promise that it would end the austerity policies. On July 5, 61 percent voted in a referendum against the austerity policies. But only

days later, Tsipras signed an austerity agreement that left all previous austerity agreements in its shadow. “Anyone who wants to know how one can fight against austerity, dictatorship and war must analyze this betrayal by Syriza,” Schwarz said.

Pessimistic conclusions can only be drawn by those who had illusions in Syriza or consciously encouraged them, he continued. The betrayal by Syriza was not a surprise for the PSG. The WWSW warned from the beginning that Syriza would betray the working class.

Schwarz quoted an article from January 24, the day before the election, which said: “But for working people, a Syriza government would not represent a way out of the crisis; on the contrary, it would represent an enormous danger. Despite its left-wing facade, Syriza is a bourgeois party that rests on affluent layers of the middle class.”

“Why were we able to anticipate this development, unlike all the pseudo-left organizations that supported and celebrated Syriza?” Schwarz asked. He explained that it was closely connected with the history of the Fourth International and its defense of Marxism. Since its founding in 1953, the international committee has systematically fought against the influence of petty bourgeois politics and ideology. “For us it was therefore no secret what Syriza represents,” Schwarz stated.

Such pseudo-left parties exist in many countries. The German Left Party, Podemos in Spain and the New Anticapitalist Party in France are scarcely distinguishable from Syriza. They use populist slogans and democratic phrases in order to promote the interests of well off layers of the middle class, but they are anti-Marxist, anti-socialist and reject the class struggle. The most important lesson of the events in Greece is that a revolutionary, socialist party that genuinely represents the interests of the working class can only be built in a struggle against such “pseudo-left” forces.

Lively Discussion

Those who attended the meeting asked many questions in the discussion following this report.

An attendee from Greece concluded from the betrayal of Syriza that one would have to build a party “from the bottom up” and not from “the top down,” as in the case of Syriza.

Schwarz answered that the decisive question was the political independence of the working class from the influence of bourgeois and petty bourgeois currents. He explained how, on the basis of the work of Marx and Engels, German social democracy developed the first mass party of workers at the end of the nineteenth century. However, it betrayed the interests of the workers in 1914 when opportunist currents won the upper hand.

The same thing happened with the communist parties when they turned against the program of international

socialism under the influence of the Stalinist bureaucracy. In Greece as well, the Stalinist party played a disastrous role. A party that really represents the interests of the workers has to be firmly anchored in the lessons of this history, Schwarz explained.

Other questions concerned the current political situation and Syriza's roots in so-called “euro-communism.” Schwarz answered that euro-communism, which developed in several European countries in the 1970s, criticized Stalinism from the right. “It distanced itself from Moscow, not so that it could represent the interests of workers, but so they could move closer to its own bourgeoisie.” For example, the Italian Communist Party under Enrico Berlinguer sought a historic compromise with the Christian Democrats.

A participant asked whether one could use a part of the EU structures to build the United Socialist States of Europe.

Schwarz said that such a maneuver was impossible. “We are strict opponents of the European Union. The EU does not embody the unity of Europe. It is an instrument of the strongest economic and financial interests. It represents a conspiracy against the working population of Europe.”

After the meeting, many participants stayed in order to continue discussing.

Florian said, “I liked the way the pilots were not pigeonholed as the elite, but were understood as a part of the working class.” He had read articles on the WWSW about Syriza and found them accurate and wanted to get to know the party that was behind them.

Thomas said that he has been reading the WWSW for more than a year and was happy to have encountered the PSG. “I was very unhappy with all the parties that I knew before that call themselves ‘communist,’” he said. “Now I read the WWSW every day.”

The topic of Greece moved him very much: “I find it crass that a civilized country like Greece has been reduced to the status of a third world country once again. It is open exploitation. Many workers do not even have health insurance anymore, but are supposed to pay for rent, food and their whole life with €350. That is impossible. Syriza is not carrying out left wing policies at all, but has only betrayed the workers in an extreme way. The main danger arises because they do this while claiming to be “left,” so that at the elections next Sunday, the right wing can profit from this. This is why the analysis of the International Committee is so important and many people should read it.”



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