

The struggle against the TTIP is a class question

The Socialist Equality Party (Germany)
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The following statement by the Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, PSG) was prepared for distribution at the demonstration “Stop TTIP and CETA! For a fair world trade” to be held on Saturday in Berlin.

Over 30 organizations have issued the call for the demonstration “Stop TTIP and CETA! For a fair world trade” to be held on Saturday in Berlin. The alliance extends from the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) and its member unions, to environmental, consumer, civil rights and development aid groups, to the German Cultural Council. The Greens, the Left Party, the Pirate Party, the Young Socialists (youth organisation of the Social Democratic Party, SPD) and some SPD district associations also support the demonstration.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), currently being negotiated by the EU with the US, and the EU’s completed free trade agreement with Canada (CETA) are reactionary treaties. Under the pretext of dismantling “trade barriers”, they aim to clear aside all obstacles which stand in the way of the unbridled accumulation of profit: social and democratic rights, environmental standards, social services, etc. The “commodities” that can be used to make money include not only autos and machinery, but also education, health and social infrastructure.

TTIP and CETA strengthen the power of the banks and big corporations at the expense of working people and must therefore be rejected and opposed.

But this raises the question of program and perspective. It makes a big difference whether one combats TTIP and CETA from the standpoint of the international working class or from the standpoint of German national interests.

The first approach leads to a socialist perspective. It employs the methods of class struggle. It strives to unite working people on both sides of the Atlantic, to encourage all forms of social resistance and to impart them with a socialist orientation. Its aim is the nationalization of the banks, big corporations and large fortunes and the reorganization of society on a socialist basis, i.e., in the interest of social need rather than profit.

The second approach leads to nationalism and war. It blurs class antagonisms in the name of a “broad alliance” and identifies “the Americans” as the enemy, rather than the ruling class in one’s own country and in the United States. It exploits

legitimate concerns about the destruction of social and democratic rights as a pretext to support German imperialism in its economic and military struggle to become a world power.

The role of the DGB

In this respect the involvement of the trade unions, the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party in the demonstration is a warning. DGB chairman Reiner Hoffmann and SPD politician Gesine Schwan are among the main speakers at the final rally.

It is the height of hypocrisy for the trade unions, of all organizations, to complain about the negative social consequences of TTIP and CETA. A year ago, in a joint paper drawn up with the Economics Ministry, the DGB welcomed TTIP as a “chance to intensify bilateral trade relations and make them fair and sustainable.” It requested a few cosmetic changes. In particular, “the right of co-determination and employee representation,” which forms the basis for the privileges and influence of the trade union bureaucracy, should remain “completely” untouched, says the paper.

Even now the DGB opposes the agreement only “in its current form,” as chairman Reiner Hoffmann and board member Stefan Körzell stressed in a jointly authored article on September 22.

No other organization has played such a major role in creating and expanding a massive low-wage sector in Germany as the trade unions. They have been at the forefront of downsizing workplaces and public services and of shutting down entire factories (such as the GM Opel plant in Bochum). Together with the bosses, they regard as their main task to make Germany “an attractive place to invest” and do so by lowering wages, increasing labour productivity and stifling any resistance by workers.

The unions fully support the European Union and have not lifted a finger to defend Greek workers against the devastating austerity diktats from Brussels and Berlin. The same is true of the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party. The latter still glorifies Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, even though he is

implementing brutal austerity measures. Partaking in an alliance against TTIP with these organizations is tantamount to lining up with the Mafia in order to fight organized crime.

The DGB only jumped on the anti-TTIP bandwagon in June this year. The daily *Die Welt* accused it of “having taken leave of its senses” and being guilty of “desertion.” Actually, the DGB aims to bring the growing opposition to the treaties under its control and steer it in a reactionary direction. It is using the movement as a means to enhance the bargaining power of the German government, and articulates the standpoint of a section of the German elite, which is sceptical of TTIP because it fears growing dependence on the US.

The geo-strategic dimension

It is characteristic that the organizers of the demonstration do not raise the geo-strategic dimension of TTIP. This dimension is illustrated by its Pacific counterpart, the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), which was finalized this week. Under the leadership of the United States, TPP links together 12 Pacific states, responsible for 40 percent of world production, and is directly aimed against China.

The *Financial Times* refers to TPP as the “economic backbone” of President Obama’s “pivot to Asia”, aimed at the military encirclement of China in preparation for possible war. The American chief negotiator for the TPP, Michael Froman, wrote in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, “trade policy is national security policy” and “markets can have as much influence as militaries.”

In Germany and Europe the completion of the TPP has triggered fears of missing the boat. There are concerns that the powerful new trading bloc could pressure the Europeans out of their Asian markets if they do not follow with a speedy agreement on TTIP.

There is, however, also the opposite reaction: concerns that the US, strengthened by its new Pacific trading bloc, will impose its will on the European economy and foreign policy through TTIP. Therefore, it is argued, Europe must adopt a different orientation and develop its own great-power politics under German leadership.

Last year the SPD think tank Friedrich Ebert Foundation published a paper arguing that TTIP is disadvantageous for the German economy. It was drawn up by the economist Heiner Flassbeck, the closest adviser to Oskar Lafontaine when the latter was German finance minister.

The trade advantages with the US, which account for just 5 percent of German foreign trade, would be outweighed by the disadvantages for Germany in other regions of the world, Flassbeck argues. “If trade barriers across the Atlantic are dismantled, but at the same time this adversely affects trade

with China or other emerging countries, the overall result of the bilateral agreement for the German and the European economy may be absolutely negative,” he writes.

If Germany’s global economic interests can be better pursued independently of the US, rather than in an alliance with it, the same applies to its foreign policy and military interests. Leading representatives of the German elite have long been campaigning for a revival of German militarism. Germany cannot “comment on world politics from the sidelines” and must play a role “commensurate with its significance”, declared German President Joachim Gauck and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier two years ago.

There are disagreements whether this return to German great-power politics is undertaken best on the side of or apart from the United States. Both paths eventually lead to militarism and war. Those who are seriously opposing TTIP, CETA and their devastating consequences should not allow themselves to be used by those who, on the basis of anti-Americanism, promote the strengthening of German imperialism, which has plunged the world into disaster twice.

An international socialist perspective

The only social force that can oppose war, militarism and the attacks on social and democratic rights is the international working class. Cooperation between European and American workers is of crucial significance.

Resistance is growing across the globe. In the US workers are rebelling against the trade union bureaucracy. For the first time in three decades workers at Fiat Chrysler have voted down a contract, which the company sought to impose in close cooperation with the United Auto Workers union. In this conflict the DGB stands squarely with the UAW, which maintains close links with IG Metall.

The PSG and its American sister organization, the Socialist Equality Party, fight for the unification of the international working class on the basis of a socialist program. We invite all serious participants at the demonstration to read the *World Socialist Web Site* on a daily basis, to contact the PSG and to join us in this struggle.



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