

The state of emergency in France and the intensification of the class struggle in Europe

PSG election meeting in Berlin-Wedding

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The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party, PSG) held its fourth meeting in a series on Sunday in Berlin-Wedding as part of its election campaign for the Berlin Senate. The guest speaker was Alex Lantier, a representative of the International Committee of the Fourth International from France who travelled directly from Paris to Berlin.

Christoph Vandreier, the deputy chairman of the party and a candidate in the Berlin election, greeted him with the words, “Could there be a more relevant issue, on this, the 15th anniversary of 9/11, the terrorist attacks on 11 September, 2001, in the United States? Since then, warmongering has intensified around the world. This is connected with sweeping attacks on the working class. The experience of French workers is of the greatest significance for workers here in Berlin, throughout Europe and globally.”

In France more than any other country, it was becoming clear that the war drive and attacks on the social position of the working class are incompatible with democratic rights. The state of emergency, which has repeatedly been extended by the Hollande government, was directed against strikes and protests by workers demonstrating against the hated labour law, Vandreier continued.

Alex Lantier began his speech by detailing the terrorist attacks of November 13, 2015 in Paris, in which 130 people lost their lives. He drew attention to the fact that many of the attackers were already known to the police and were able to repeatedly cross the French and Schengen zone borders unhindered in the weeks leading up to the attacks.

Immediately after the attacks, the Socialist Party (PS) government of François Hollande imposed a state of emergency, which suspended basic democratic rights such as the right to protest and the right of assembly. The emergency laws were passed almost unanimously by the National Assembly and remain in force today. Significantly, all representatives of the pseudo-left Left Front led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon voted for the laws in the first round of voting last November.

The Left Front is the French sister party of Germany’s Left Party. During his talk, Lantier presented a photo showing the chairman of the Left Front, Mélenchon, next to Oscar Lafontaine, the former chairman of the Left Party. The two men have been close friends for years.

Lantier noted, “The state of emergency was not directed against

Islamic State, but against the Muslim population and the working class in France.” He presented statistics released by the French interior ministry in January. According to this, 3,021 house searches were conducted, but there was only one trial held on charges of terrorism.

Thousands of apartments belonging to Muslim families were searched. For damage caused, such as broken down doors, no compensation was offered. Environmental activists who wanted to protest in Paris at the climate change conference were placed under house arrest. In December, striking Sodexo workers were fired and Goodyear workers sentenced to prison terms.

The restriction of democratic rights by the state of emergency was combined with the passage by the PS government of the hated labour law, named after labour minister el-Khomri. This legislation was drafted with the assistance of the SPD and Peter Hartz, the author of the notorious Hartz laws in Germany. The el-Khomri law extended the work week, undermined working conditions and suspended the basic rights of French workers.

With his attempt to establish the power to withdraw French citizenship in the constitution, Hollande was drawing on the fascist laws of the Vichy regime.

Lantier also showed that the advanced preparations for the construction of a police state and the establishment of dictatorship was an expression of the deep crisis of capitalism and was aimed at preparing for the outbreak of explosive class struggle in France and throughout Europe.

He described in detail the protest movement in the spring. Since March, millions of workers and youth repeatedly took to the streets to protest against the el-Khomri labour law. On March 31, 1.2 million people took part in nationwide marches. On April 5, 130 protesters were arrested. On June 15, Prime Minister Valls threatened to ban protests against the law. He thus made it absolutely clear that the state of emergency was directed against the working class.

Lantier examined the role of the pseudo-left organisations and their academic stooges, which are playing a critical role in supporting the emergency laws and the preparation of dictatorship against the working class. Parties like the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) and Left Front in France, and the Left Party in Germany are bourgeois parties which defend the capitalist system and provide it with a “left” cover. They represent a section of the

privileged petty bourgeoisie, which is hostile to the working class and prepared to do anything to block a revolutionary development.

Lantier ended his contribution by calling for the building of an international movement against war. The most important ally of workers and youth in France opposed to the reactionary policies of the Hollande government were workers and youth in Germany and all other countries. "In the struggle for socialism, against austerity and war, the PSG and the supporters of the ICFI in France fight for the united socialist states of Europe," he concluded.

A lively discussion developed following Lantier's speech, above all on the role of the Left Party.

One member of the audience, who had lived and worked in the GDR (German Democratic Republic), said he had come across the PSG when he searched for the words "war" and "Germany" online. Several articles against war appeared, and it was for this reason that he had come to the meeting. He asked the question if, given the far advanced preparations for war, the PSG should align itself with Left Party representatives like Bodo Ramelow or Sahra Wagenknecht so it was not politically isolated. The Fourth International was after all not well known by the masses, he said.

Andy Niklaus, who lives in Wedding and is a candidate in the election in District 7, responded, "How can one ally with a party which invites General Kujat to a party meeting? In our election campaign and struggle against war, which we have made the main issue, we are finding considerable support."

There is growing opposition to war and social attacks in the working class. But this was being systematically suppressed by the trade unions, Left Party and their pseudo-left supporters. The working class could only be mobilised in struggle against these organisations, Niklaus stated.

Niklaus noted that he had worked at the Berlin public transport company (BVG) for 25 years and explained the role of the Ver.di trade union, which, in cooperation with the SPD and Left Party, had forced through major pay cuts and attacks on working conditions. As part of the election campaign, he wrote an appeal to his colleagues at the BVG and workers throughout Berlin to organise independently of Ver.di and the other trade unions and build workplace support committees for the PSG.

Alex Lantier intervened in the discussion, "We do not yet have a mass organisation in France, but despite this I do not feel isolated. Francois Hollande's PS is isolated. Many workers share that view. If we looked for allies among the NPA or the Left Front, we would isolate ourselves from the working class. There is no support in the French working class for the justification of the Vichy regime, no support for cuts and no support for war."

Ulrich Rippert, chairman of the PSG and lead candidate in the Berlin election, said during the discussion, "The talk we heard today made very clear that a massive movement in opposition to the PS government has developed in the French working class. This was systematically blocked by the trade unions, the Stalinist Communist Party and all of the pseudo-left organisations. The political independence of the working class has to be fought for against these tendencies.

Rippert described the role of the Left Party and its predecessor, the PDS. The PDS intervened 25 years ago to reintroduce capitalist relations into the GDR. Its pro-capitalist orientation was part of its

political DNA. In addition, he showed how the Left Party bears considerable responsibility for the rise of the AfD. Firstly, the Left Party supported social attacks and carried them out with extreme ruthlessness wherever it wields political power. In this way they create the misery that is exploited by right-wing demagogues. Because they carry out these right-wing policies in the name of the left, they contribute to the frustration which nourishes the AfD.

Endrik Bastian, who also grew up in the GDR and is a candidate in the Mitte 5 electoral district, focused on the role of the Left Party and its PDS predecessor in his remarks: "The PDS and Left Party were always brought into government when attacks against the working class had to be imposed which the CDU or SPD could not have managed to implement alone."

He recalled the Magdeburg Model, which assured PDS backing for an SPD minority government in Saxony-Anhalt. "Their policies resulted in unemployment of 20 percent and the transformation of full-time jobs into low-wage positions. The Magdeburg Model was the precursor to Hartz IV and further attacks. If there is talk today about bringing the Left Party into government once again, this must be taken as a warning of the sharp attacks being prepared in the period ahead."

Enrico, 29, a student of history and philosophy at the University of Potsdam, attended his first PSG meeting. He told the WSWS, "I thought the talk was very good. It was convincingly demonstrated that the development towards a police state in France is already very advanced and that the state of emergency is above all directed against the working class.

"Much of what was spoken about has already occurred to me. I received the invitation to the meeting at a PSG information stand. My impression is that you are the only serious left-wing party. This is what we really need, especially because of the rightward shift in Europe." Asked about the war danger, he said, "The militarisation against Russia and developments in Turkey, I think it's disturbing."

The next meeting on Thursday concludes the PSG's election campaign. It is entitled "Vote against war and militarism! Vote PSG!"

At the meeting, representatives of the ICFI from several countries and representatives of the PSG will discuss a socialist programme for the building of a socialist society which links opposition to war with the struggle against inequality, the strengthening of the state apparatus and xenophobia.

Thursday, 15 September, Ufa-Fabrik, (Theatersaal), Viktoriastraße 10-18, 12105 Berlin.



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