

Socialist Equality Party candidate in European elections appears on German TV

Our reporter
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The European election campaign of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP—Socialist Equality Party), the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, is entering a new stage. Election posters have been put on display in a number of cities, information tables are being organised, and the initial election meetings are being prepared.

On Wednesday, SGP candidate Saravan Ratnamaheson was interviewed by the television and radio station Südwestrundfunk (SWR). SWR, which broadcasts to the southwest of the country, is the second largest regional station in Germany's ARD public television network.

As part of its coverage of next month's European elections, the station posed seven questions to all of the parties participating. Candidates have only one minute to respond to each question and the interview is filmed live.

Ratnamaheson, 65, is a member of the national committee of the SGP and works as a network administrator. Born in Sri Lanka, he came to Germany in 1978 as a political refugee. He joined the Trotskyist movement in 1987 during the Sri Lankan civil war. He is one of a group of Tamils, who, when confronted with the bankruptcy of the Tamil nationalist movement, joined the struggle for international socialism and the unity of the working class. Ratnamaheson writes about Sri Lanka and India for the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Some of the questions posed by the SWR dealt with regional and local issues, but Ratnamaheson nevertheless took the opportunity to explain the basic perspectives of the SGP.

To the first question—"Many cities in southwest Germany have decided to ban diesel fuel autos. What is the solution to this problem on an EU-wide basis?"—he replied: "The SGP is the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. We participate in the European elections, together with our sister parties in France and the UK, in order to mobilise

workers in Europe against the ascendancy of right-wing forces, against growing militarism and rapidly growing social inequality.

"We are opponents of the European Union and fight to unify Europe on a socialist basis.

"The diesel fraud is the direct result of the criminal activities of the auto industry. Manipulated diesel engines were sold with the full knowledge of the industry heads. As of today, not a single responsible person has been punished, and there has been no compensation for the car owners affected.

"We fight for the expropriation of the auto concerns and all the major corporations and banks without compensation. Only in this way can production be placed under the democratic control of the population and such criminal activities prevented."

The second question was: "The euro has made the EU more cohesive, but also more vulnerable to financial crises. To what extent should EU countries support one another financially?"

In response, Ratnamaheson stressed that the EU is not a community based on social solidarity, but rather an alliance of European corporations and banks against workers in all European countries. The euro is being used to plunder the weaker countries of Europe.

"Economically strong countries," he said, "such as Germany and France have benefited from the European single market at the expense of weaker nations. In 2009, Germany imposed an austerity program on the Greek government. Millions of workers lost their jobs, their health care and other social benefits."

He explained that the German government profited from the Greek crisis. "From 2010 to 2017, Germany received €2.9 billion in interest on Greek government bonds—money it used to boost its own budget."

The third question was about low-wage jobs and what the EU should do about it. "Placing any hope in the EU

on this issue is a dangerous illusion,” Ratnamaheson replied, adding, “The EU introduced all of the rules and laws that make this super-exploitation possible. All of the German automakers, including VW, Audi and Daimler, have cars and parts produced in Eastern European countries, where they exploit workers at low wages.”

He emphasised that millions of people toil in Germany for the official minimum wage, which is insufficient to pay for rent and the cost of living. Poverty is rising in all EU countries and 15.5 million people in Germany were officially regarded as at risk of poverty in 2017.

Ratnamaheson then addressed the role of the trade unions, which play a key role in the expansion of low-wage work. “They blackmail workers into accepting low wages with the threat that production will otherwise be transferred to other countries,” he said. “This is right-wing propaganda aimed at dividing workers across Europe.”

To a question on EU agricultural policy, he responded: “EU agricultural subsidies are tailor-made for the big farming corporations. Many farmers in Eastern European countries have already given up their farms because of ruinous EU regulations.”

In order to increase profits, the major concerns were destroying the environment and promoting monoculture. “It is possible to organise agriculture in an environmentally friendly way and plan in the interests of the population only when the big concerns are placed under democratic control.”

When asked how Europe should respond to the refugee crisis, Ratnamaheson replied, “How has Europe reacted so far? The EU has turned Europe into a huge prison for refugees, with camps, watchtowers and barbed wire.” He denounced the “Foreigners out!” policy of Fortress Europe, which has led to the deaths of 34,000 people in the Mediterranean, calling it a “horrendous crime.”

“This nationalist and xenophobic policy,” he said, “which is backed by all of the establishment parties in Europe, has paved the way for the rise of fascists and far-right elements throughout Europe. In Germany, refugee policy is dictated by the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

“At the same time, EU countries are supporting NATO wars that have devastated the countries from which people are fleeing. The SGP unconditionally defends the right to asylum. Every worker has the right to live and work in the country of his choice.”

Asked what should be done to promote unlimited mobile communication, the SGP candidate said that the internet is a highly democratic medium that promotes

global cooperation, but it is controlled by a handful of giant corporations. “Google and Facebook are working closely with governments around the world to censor the internet in an effort to suppress every form of socialist resistance and silence all voices of opposition.”

Ratnamaheson stressed that one of the SGP election posters currently being hung in many cities reads, “Free Assange, Free Manning—Defend Freedom of Speech.”

The founder of WikiLeaks was confined in the Ecuadorian embassy in London for more than six years, he explained, in complete isolation from the outside world. Now he has been arrested and faces extradition to the United States, where he faces the death penalty. His only crime was to have exposed and published on the internet documents detailing US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

After the interview, Ratnamaheson said he would have liked to have had more time to answer the last question: “What is your vision for the EU in 2030?”

This is his full answer: “Europe faces the alternative: socialism or barbarism! All the spectres of the past are back. If the working class does not overthrow the EU and capitalist governments and establish the United Socialist States of Europe, then dictatorship, fascism and war are inevitable.

“The ruling class is already relying on extreme right-wing movements in every EU state. In Germany, the neo-Nazis are sitting in the Bundestag for the first time since 1945. But this time they will not succeed! This time, we will see to it that the Nuremberg Trials take place before any new war and not afterwards.

“Resistance is growing everywhere. In France, the yellow vests are protesting. In Poland, teachers are on strike, and also in the US. The working class is engaging in new struggles worldwide.

“These struggles of the working class necessitate a new party. The SPD, the Left and the Greens are all on the side of the EU and the capitalist governments. That’s why the building of the SGP is so vital.

“We reject the EU. It is an instrument of the banks and corporations. We fight for the unity of the European working class, for a workers’ government and the United Socialist States of Europe.”



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