

European election: SGP holds its second campaign meeting in Frankfurt-Main

Our correspondents
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The second meeting of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) took place on April 16 in Frankfurt-Main as part of its campaign for the European election. The SGP is participating in the European election in order to build sections of the Fourth International across the continent. Two days earlier, leading representatives of the Fourth International addressed the party's first election meeting in Berlin. In Frankfurt, SGP Chairman Ulrich Rippert highlighted the importance of the International Committee of the Fourth International and its perspective of a United Socialist States of Europe.

The meeting was attended by many SGP supporters, readers of the WSW, and workers from the city and surrounding region. In her introduction, SGP candidate Marianne Arens emphasized that the arrest of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in London was a turning point in history. The ruling elites are no longer prepared to defend basic democratic rights.

"Assange did not commit a crime," she said. "He's been educating people about the gruesome war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. ... He was a source of inspiration for Edward Snowden, without whom we would not know the full extent of the mass spying operation of the general public. All the mud and filth, together with the charges laid against Assange, are fictitious. They are aimed at sully his reputation and persuading the public to accept his rendition to the US."

The attack on Assange, together with the campaign against the brave whistleblower Chelsea Manning, was "an attack on us all." At the time of Assange's arrest, the sections of the ICFI immediately issued a call for protests around the world, and the SGP had also put the struggle to free Julian Assange at the heart of its European election campaign. "The ruling class is proceeding mercilessly... huge social and political forces are at work. Those who want to defeat them must rely on a force that is even stronger. That is why we are turning to the international working class. We are well aware that the conditions for a mass social uprising are developing rapidly."

The situation for the working class today, more than 10 years after the financial crisis of 2008, was vividly described by SGP candidate Saravan Ratnamaheson. He declared: "The burden of the banking crisis was shifted entirely onto the shoulders of the working population. The result has been an enormous increase in poverty and social inequality."

Ratnamaheson pointed to the rapid growth of low-paid labor and agency work in virtually every branch of industry. German

industry is heavily dependent on exports and has now been hit hard today by the EU crisis, Brexit and global trade wars: "In the auto industry, virtually every major corporation—from VW, Opel, Ford, to auto suppliers such as Bosch—have announced mass redundancies. Corporations are using the turn to electric mobility as an excuse to conduct unprecedented attacks on auto workers' rights and working conditions."

The main reason for the current global job massacre was the power exercised by the financial markets and hedge funds. "They have ordered this global attack on the working class to increase their dividends and profits," Ratnamaheson said.

The SGP candidate drew a balance sheet of the activities of the trade unions in the past few decades: "They are not only riddled with corruption, above all their nationalist perspective and the fact that they subordinate every issue to the interests of the profit system have turned them into right-wing servants of the corporations."

Ratnamaheson described the lessons of the strike wave in the low-wage factories of Matamoros, Mexico. He explained the need for workers to set up action committees that operate independently of the unions. "The workers' response must be an international socialist perspective!" he stressed.

He informed the audience about the historic workers' assembly in Detroit on December 9, 2018. More than 80 auto workers decided to set up independent action committees and recognised the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party as their political leadership. "This is a significant step for the international working class," Ratnamaheson said. "It is increasingly clear that the working class is turning towards our movement in the rapidly growing class struggle and regards it as its political and programmatic leadership."

The next speaker was Ulrich Rippert, SGP chairman, European election candidate and a member of the international WSW editorial board. He spoke about the significance of the Trotskyist world movement: "We are building a party in the working class of Europe to overthrow capitalism, enable the working class to take power and establish the United Socialist States of Europe."

"We draw from the confidence that comes from history, in particular, the experience of the past 30 years which has confirmed that the ICFI is the only force in the world which bases itself on a correct historical analysis."

"Thirty years ago, we saw the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the GDR and German reunification," Rippert said.

“Two years later followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union.” He recalled that all of the main parties and mainstream media portrayed this development as the “failure of socialism,” “the triumph of capitalism” or “the end of history” (Fukuyama).

At that time, the ICFI took a completely different view. Rippert quoted from an election manifesto of the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter, a predecessor of the SGP, drawn up for the 1989 European elections.

“The policy of the Stalinist bureaucracy has plunged the countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, into a devastating economic crisis,” the 30-year-old text read. “The cause of this crisis is the isolation of the Soviet economy from the world economy.” These countries were threatened with the “reintroduction of capitalism and the exploitation of the Soviet and Eastern European working class on a capitalist basis.”

Rippert then pointed out the current deplorable situation of workers in Eastern Europe and stated: “We clearly predicted the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe with all the resulting catastrophic social consequences.” The globalisation of production has stripped away the ground from beneath all national programs. The result has been a powerful resurgence of all contradictions of capitalism. “There can be no doubt,” Rippert said, “that our assessment, which we outlined decades ago and tirelessly defended, has proved to be correct.”

Rippert then addressed the question: “What constitutes the strength of a party?” It is crucial, the speaker said, that a party can correctly assess great historical changes and provide a progressive perspective. “We did that and that demonstrates the political strength of our party.”

Rippert then contrasted the position of the ICFI with the propaganda pumped out by the ruling class and its parties. Instead of “democracy, peace and freedom,” the last 30 years have led to an extreme enrichment of an elite and an equally extreme impoverishment of the working class. This is demonstrated above all in Europe, by the plundering of Greece, Rippert declared.

“The rivalries and conflicts that turned Europe into the main battlefield of two world wars are being resurrected today under the pressure of the global crisis of capitalism,” he continued, and described the far-advanced preparations for war on the part of the imperialist powers. This went hand in hand with moves towards dictatorship and police states, together with the promotion of right-wing extremist and fascist parties,” he said.

Rippert warned against the return of fascism in Germany, which, unlike in the 1930s, was not a mass movement, but “draws its strength from the support it receives from the ruling elites and the state apparatus”. The far-right Alternative for Germany now sits in the German parliament. It has deep roots in the state apparatus and enjoys support above all from layers in the police, the military and the intelligence services.

The experience of war and fascism left deep scars in Germany and left behind a firm conviction that there should never be another war and no repeat of fascism. This sentiment was deeply rooted in the minds of millions, Rippert said. The class struggle had returned. “The future will not be decided in the German chancellery, nor in the EU Commission in Brussels,” Rippert affirmed, “and certainly not in the European parliament.” The

future depended on those who build the Fourth International and prepared the working class for its future role.

The speeches were followed by a lively discussion. An IYSSE member spoke on the situation of youth in Europe and said: “The continent is being rocked by growing social inequality and horrendous levels of youth unemployment.” He pointed out that many youth are among the thousands of people who reject the EU, and also end up drowning in the Mediterranean. The EU had struck up disastrous deals with African dictators to prevent people fleeing to Europe.

An Italian worker from Frankfurt asked how the social revolution would take place in practice. He was worried that workers, as they have done in Italy, would choose “Salvini and the Lega Nord.”

He was told in reply that Salvini had by not been elected by a large majority of the Italian working class. “This government could only come to power because previous governments had implemented catastrophic social policies,” Marianne Arens said. “This is the responsibility of the Stalinist CPI and all its successor parties, from the PDS to Rifondazione to the Democrats of Matteo Renzi. Their pro-capitalist stance created the confusion and frustration from which the Five Star Movement could profit. Five Star in turn levered Lega Nord and Salvini into the saddle and provided the necessary parliamentary majority for the latter’s fascist policies.”

In Italy, the working class was also determined to stand firm against fascism, as was demonstrated by the recent demonstration of 200,000 against racism in Milan. However, the situation is fraught with great dangers, which is why it was so important to establish a section of the Fourth International in Italy.

“The revolution is an objective process,” Ulrich Rippert concluded. “It is emerging as an elemental uprising, as the only progressive alternative to the problems thrown up by capitalism. The ruling class stands with its back to the wall and is increasingly resorting to war and fascism.” The class struggle is undergoing a new upswing worldwide, but, “These struggles need a new political leadership. That is why the ICFI is building the *World Socialist Web Site* as the authentic voice of Marxism.”

Rippert closed the meeting with an appeal: “Study the history of this party and actively participate in its construction!”



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