The rejection of fascism and war is deeply rooted in the German working class

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3 May 2021

The following speech was delivered by Christoph Vandreier, assistant national secretary of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Germany) to the 2021 International May Day Online Rally held by the World Socialist Web Site *and the International Committee of the Fourth International on May 1.*

I'm very happy to be able to participate in this May Day rally and in this critical initiative. And I extend the revolutionary greetings of the Socialist Equality Party in Germany. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees is the instrument enabling workers to take a stand against the policy of deliberate mass infections and against blatant social inequality, as only the independent intervention of the international working class can put an end to capitalist barbarism, mass deaths and the threat of war.

Opposition to the ruthless policy of the ruling class is also growing in Germany. Two weeks ago, when the government called on the population to put candles for the victims of COVID-19 on windowsills, hundreds of thousands of workers rejected this as a cynical manoeuvre and instead put the candles in front of town halls, state parliaments and the Bundestag to denounce those who are really responsible. There have been numerous strikes and protests at schools against their completely unsafe reopening. Workers from the aviation service company WISAG at Frankfurt Airport went on a hunger strike for several days to protest against layoffs and the theft of their wages. Workers in the metal industry also organized protests and strikes.

All these actions are the harbingers of much broader struggles, into which the working class is objectively driven by the policy of profits over lives. However, workers are already having a very important experience that underscores the necessity of building the International Workers Alliance and advancing an international socialist perspective.

In every single one of these struggles the trade unions are on the side of the companies. Over the last year, they have seen to it that the factories widely remained open and became veritable hot spots of the pandemic. Amid rising numbers of infections, the German educators union GEW is demanding that schools be reopened. Workers of the aviation company WISAG directed their protests against the public services union Verdi because it openly supported the company.

In the metal industry, the trade union IG Metall imposed wage cuts of up to three percent in March, while the profits of the auto companies went sky high. For their service, the union bureaucrats have received enormous sums. Now, the head of the works council at Volkswagen, Bernd Osterloh, has directly jointed corporate management. In this position he will receive two million euros per year. These organisations have absolutely nothing to do with representing the interests of the workers. Rather, they act as co-managers and corporate police forces.

Thirty years after the collapse of Stalinism and the "end of history" triumphalism, the pandemic exposes the bankruptcy of capitalism. The reign of the financial oligarchy is incompatible with the basic needs and even the lives of workers. This fact is demonstrated particularly sharply in Eastern Europe. Health care systems that were intact were destroyed. Every single branch of society was sacrificed for the immediate drive for profits. During the entire course of the pandemic, workers were forced to go to completely unsafe workplaces in order to keep production running and secure supply chains. Today, there is not a single region in the world with death rates as high as in Eastern Europe.

However, also in Germany almost half of the

hospitals were closed as part of the policy of austerity. Here, the response to the pandemic is characterized as well by a policy of allowing the virus to spread in the population. The results are already more than 80.000 deaths, overcrowded ICUs, with more and more young people who have to be treated.

At the same time, hundreds of billions of euros were handed out to the super-rich. Amidst the pandemic, the ten richest people in Germany have seen their wealth increase by 35 percent to 242 billion dollars. Moreover, billions are allocated to the armament of the military forces. Over the course of the last year, Germany has increased its military spending by 5.2 percent, a rate of increase surpassing every other country.

On the other side, 40 percent of workers have suffered from tangible income losses. For the time after the upcoming general election, all parties are planning to escalate this policy which is in essence the same as the one pursued by the right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).

With Armin Laschet, the Christian Democrats have nominated the politician as their candidate who has promoted the policy of "herd immunity" most aggressively. The Social Democrats field finance minister Olaf Scholz, who is responsible for austerity and for the build-up of the state apparatus over recent years.

The nominally "left" opposition parties are no alternative, but rather criticize the reactionary policies of the Grand Coalition government from the right in many cases. The candidate of the Greens, Annalena Baerbock, accuses the government of "passivity in foreign affairs," demanding an aggressive policy against the nuclear powers Russia and China. She wants Ukraine to enter NATO and the EU and build a European Army.

The lead candidate of the Left Party in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Sahra Wagenknecht, has just published her new book (*Die Selbstgerechten [The Self-righteous]*) in which she openly ties in with the tradition of thought of the Nazis. She stirs up hatred against migrants, wants jobs for Germans only, and defends German capital against its supposedly greedier foreign rivals. For this line, she is hailed by the right-wing AfD, business representatives and bourgeois media outlets in equal measure.

All of this must be seen as a warning. Eighty years after the invasion of the Soviet Union and the systematic extermination of 25 million Soviet citizens, the German ruling class is returning to its great power fantasies and its fascist traditions. All opposition to this right-wing conspiracy is to be suppressed in the general election.

Although social contacts must be reduced to a minimum during the pandemic, new parties have to physically gather almost 30,000 signatures in order to be allowed to participate in the election, which means that they are effectively excluded. With this fundamental attack on democratic rights, the ruling elite seeks to prevent the socialist candidates of the SGP from being voted for at all. With this step, the government continues its efforts to suppress the SGP.

Drawing on the tradition of the Anti-Socialist Laws and the Nazis' *Willensstrafrecht* (punishment for thought), the Ministry of the Interior declared our party "an enemy of the constitution" already two years ago, because we "fight for a democratic, egalitarian and socialist society."

Germany is, however, not only the country of Bismarck and the Nazis. It is also the country of the first socialist mass party, that rooted the program of international socialism in the working class. And it is precisely because of the crimes committed by German imperialism in the 20th century that the rejection of fascism and war is so deeply rooted in the working class.

The Trotskyist world movement defended Marxist principles against revisionism and Stalinism. Basing ourselves on this foundation, we are linking our party to the enormous opposition that exists within the working class today. This May Day rally is a strong expression of this. We will use our participation in the general election to provide a voice and a perspective to the growing opposition and to build the SGP as the new socialist mass party.

We urge our audience to register today for the International Workers Alliance, support our election campaign and become a member of the SGP.