

“Life Instead of Profits”: Initial election meeting of the SEP in Germany

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19 August 2021

Last Sunday the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP), the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), broadcast its initial election rally in advance of the German federal elections on September 26. The address to the international working class, titled “Life Instead of Profits,” enunciated the urgent necessity of building an international workers’ movement led by a socialist program to defend life, health and the fate of the planet from the capitalist profit system.

In his opening address, the deputy chairman and leading candidate of the SGP, Christoph Vandreier, underscored the fact that all other parties participating in the election advance a capitalist program, that is, a program in support of war, advocating an unhindered spread of the coronavirus and advancing social inequality.

Vandreier pointed to the universal drive among establishment parties to open schools in the midst of the pandemic. Even the pseudo-left party Die Linke (The Left Party), at the nominal left end of the German political spectrum, has abandoned safety measures in states where they hold power, opening schools without masks, coronavirus tests or vaccination requirements, thereby tacitly accepting thousands of unnecessary deaths in order to enable parents to return to work to generate profits for the owners of capital.

All establishment parties, Vandreier emphasized, continually demonstrate their preparedness to fuel the engines of profit with the bodies of the pandemic’s victims, supporting the transfer of hundreds of billions to the banks and big corporations while trimming funding for educational and occupational safety to the bone. The result has been a bonanza for the rich. And those on the short end economically must now foot the bill as bailed-out companies use the pandemic as a pretext to carry out long-planned cuts in staff and compensation.

The pandemic, as well as action to prevent climate change, require a global answer, he said. Both crises show that the capitalist profit interest cannot address the needs of humanity and the environment. Instead, capitalism addresses the needs of wealthy capitalists through exploitation of the working class, destruction of the environment and imperialist war.

The attempts by US capitalism to maintain its monopoly on power by military means have destroyed entire societies in the Middle East and ended in debacle in Afghanistan, yet the ruling elites are preparing for yet greater conflagrations against China and Russia.

German imperialism, throwing off the pacifist pretensions imposed upon it after its first two attempts at world power, is likewise planning to militarily advance its strategic economic interests and even now is sending warships to the South China Sea while the candidates of the established parties fall all over themselves to demonstrate their support for the Bundeswehr. Even the leader of the Left Party,

Dietmar Bartsch, has made clear his support for foreign interventions and NATO.

Vandreier stated: “These ruthless policies in the interest of the super-rich are incompatible with the democratic rights of the population.” In an attempt to stave off the rising tide of discontent and revolutionary sentiment, the ruling elites worldwide are turning to the methods of dictatorship and fascism, strengthening the police and stoking the extreme right.

In Germany, right-wing extremist cells have been uncovered in the police, military and intelligence apparatus while the ruling coalition has elevated the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) to the status of official opposition and adopted its programmatic demands.

In the United States, the heart of world capitalism, former President Donald Trump attempted a coup to block the transition of power, using similar right-wing forces, although unsuccessful, then with impunity, since the Democrats will not pursue him, as they represent the same interests as the Republicans.

But, as Vandreier explained, the working class is awakening. In the US, teachers and workers in the auto industry have begun to shake off their union chains by engaging in wildcat strikes. Strikes in essential transport sectors like rail and air have erupted in Germany in spite of attempts by the unions—corrupt appendages of the corporations—to shut them down. “We are running in the federal election to give a voice and a socialist perspective to this growing opposition,” said Vandreier.

- The SGP demands an immediate closure of schools and all non-essential industry with full financial compensation for lost wages to bring an end to the pandemic in accordance with scientific advice.

- The SGP demands the implementation of a global vaccination program and an end to the vaccine nationalism and pandemic profiteering rampant under capitalism.

- The SGP advocates the formation of rank-and-file committees among workers and teachers, independent of the unions and establishment parties, to linked into a cohesive movement across industries and national boundaries.

- The SGP demands equal rights for all people residing in Germany, regardless of their origin.

- The SGP demands the liquidation of the Bundeswehr, NATO and the Verfassungsschutz (German secret service) and an end to all foreign interventions.

- The SGP does not appeal to the capitalist government to pursue these policies, rather addresses itself to the working class, the revolutionary stratum that must take power into its own hands, guided by socialist principles, to put lives before profits, end war and save the planet.

The demands of the SGP, enunciated by Christoph Vandreier, found support and approval among the international panel of speakers at the online rally, who expanded upon Vandreier's comments.

Joseph Kishore, National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the United States, addressed the rally, noting that the workers in every country face the same global problems. He explained that the death and social misery resulting from the coronavirus pandemic are not merely a tragedy, but rather are an enormous social crime for which definite individuals are responsible. The policy of the ruling elites, however, is dictated exclusively by its impact on the markets and the wealth of the rich.

Kishore emphasized that the Democrats and Republicans are united in defending Wall Street, which is why the Biden administration has, despite promising to "follow the science," continued the Trump policy of opening schools and the economy, despite the emergence of the Delta variant of the coronavirus that readily spreads among and severely sickens children. He stated, "The pandemic has exposed the political, social and indeed moral bankruptcy of capitalism."

Elisabeth Zimmermann, SGP candidate in North Rhine-Westphalia, spoke about the responsibility of the capitalist governments for the catastrophic flooding and attendant deaths of well over 200 people in western Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands last month. "The catastrophe was not simply an unavoidable natural event, rather a social crime," she said.

Funding for infrastructure and warning systems has been systematically cut, while military expenditures have shot through the roof. Politicians in the affected area were informed by meteorologists of the impending disaster, but, not wanting to pay for an evacuation, did not relay the warning to the population, who were swept up unawares by the flood waters.

The floods in western Europe, Turkey and China, like the forest fires in southern Europe and Siberia, have been definitely linked to climate change. Zimmermann noted: "The capitalist profit system and its political representatives are responsible for the suffering and destruction."

They have ignored scientific advice and instead of creating the world order necessary to tackle global problems, have divided the world into antagonistic nation states. "The ruling class is neither willing nor able to save the climate or protect the environment because doing so would undermine its drive for profits and its geostrategic interests," she said, adding, "the SGP demands billions to support flood victims and to rebuild the destroyed houses, businesses and infrastructure."

The SGP, said Zimmermann, is fighting for the expropriation of the big banks and fortunes and the seizure of the corporations and means of production.

Tania Kent of the Socialist Equality Party in the UK opposed the demand that people "learn to live with the virus." She explained the party's critique of reopening schools during the raging pandemic as a massive, criminal experiment, noting the long-term effects of COVID, calling the massive spread among young people a "pandemic of the innocent."

Due to the policies of the capitalist governments, "coronavirus will never be eradicated, rather it will become endemic and will circulate in the population for generations."

Alex Lantier, chairman of Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES), spoke about the coupling of the pseudo-left with the far-right in France. These groups are finding common ground in opposition to the "vaccine passport" proposed by President Macron, which would leave

large portions of the population vulnerable to the disease. He noted that there is no "right" to reject vaccinations so that a deadly virus can spread.

Ula? Ate?çi, from the Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu in Turkey, spoke about the rising tide of workers movements in Turkey and throughout the world. He compared the massive and increasing unemployment, especially among the youth, to the record rise in the stock markets. While expressing solidarity with striking workers in Germany and the world over, he noted the significant development in Turkey that sections of energy workers have gone on strike, in defiance of their unions and laws forbidding industrial action.

Ate?çi illustrated the cynical response of the establishment parties to the flood of refugees fleeing Afghanistan. While the bourgeois nationalist parties use the refugees as pawns in negotiations with the West, the pseudo-left uses the same refugees as scapegoats for internal problems.

Dietmar Gaisenkersting, election candidate for the SGP in North Rhine-Westphalia, contrasted the record highs in the stock index and record profits at VW and Daimler, accompanied by huge dividends for shareholders, with the axing of jobs and increased workload for employees at the same companies.

The divide between treatment of the rich and the rank-and-file worker underlies the significance of the strikes by rail and airport personnel in Germany, he said. But these workers, like their counterparts in every nation, face a battle on two fronts, against management, who wish to save costs at workers' expense, and against the unions, whose privileged existence depends on their allegiance to management.

Gaisenkersting praised the emergent alliance of rank-and-file committees and stressed the necessity of building the revolutionary party, the SGP and the Fourth International, to coordinate and guide these nascent global struggles.

Christoph Vandreier said in conclusion, "The only possibility to prevent further catastrophes is through the international mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist program."

The next election rally will take place at 8:15 p.m. (UTC+02:00) on Sunday, August 22.



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