

Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei final election rally: A socialist perspective against welfare cuts, militarism and herd immunity

Our reporters

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On September 19, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) held its closing event for the federal election. SGP candidates and international guests—Joseph Kishore, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the US, and Chris Marsden, national secretary of the SEP in the UK—spoke about the intensification of the class struggle and a socialist perspective against welfare cuts, militarism and herd immunity.

The online event was moderated by Johannes Stern, deputy editor of the German-language *World Socialist Web Site*. “Our election meeting is taking place under extraordinary conditions,” Stern explained. “The coronavirus pandemic has brought home to the whole world the bankruptcy of capitalism.” Like the outbreak of World War I in 1914, he said, the pandemic was a trigger event that had enormously accelerated the already well-advanced economic, social and political crisis of the world capitalist system.

The crucial issue in this situation was “that of clear political perspective and leadership,” Stern declared, quoting from the SGP election statement:

“No social problem can be resolved without expropriating the banks and major corporations and placing them under the democratic control of the working class. Their profits and wealth must be confiscated, and the trillions given to them over the past years must be returned. The world economy must be reorganised on the basis of a scientific, rational plan. To realise this programme, the working class requires its own party.”

Christoph Vandreier, SGP vice chairman and lead candidate, spoke at length on the importance of the SGP’s election campaign. He noted that all the important issues were largely being left out of the official election campaign. “In the midst of the deepest crisis of capitalism and a historical pandemic, the debates between the candidates for chancellor and the other parties in the Bundestag seem like they come from another world.”

In the last three-way debate, he said, the 93,000 deaths, at least, from the pandemic in Germany were not even mentioned. The three candidates for chancellor, Olaf Scholz (Social Democratic Party, SPD), Armin Laschet (Christian Democrats, CDU/CSU) and Annalena Baerbock (Greens), had “already ruled out a lockdown beforehand, which would be necessary to save hundreds of thousands of lives. Instead, they are pursuing policies that put the profits of banks and corporations ahead of people’s lives.”

He said this also applied to the Left Party, which was doing everything it could to become a member of the next federal government. As in Berlin, Bremen and Thuringia, where the Left

Party was already in the state governments, a federal government including the Left Party would push ahead with the policies of herd immunity, social attacks and rearmament. In the election campaign, “hardly a day goes by when representatives of the Left Party don’t emphasize that they would agree to NATO, the Bundeswehr (armed forces) and foreign military missions if they were in the government.”

The SGP, he said, opposes this right-wing conspiracy of all the establishment parties and fights to arm the working class with an international socialist programme. Such a programme, he said, was “not a nice idea and not a utopia.” It was based on “the real struggles of workers breaking out all over the world.”

Vandreier ended his contribution with a strong appeal to support and build the SGP and the Fourth International beyond election day. “No worker should throw away his vote and elect one of the parties responsible for the current misery and who are preparing whole new dimensions of social attacks. Only a vote for the SGP is a vote against war, fascism and the policy of herd immunity. Only if workers around the world intervene independently in the political process can a new catastrophe be prevented.”

Marianne Arens, SGP National Committee member and a candidate in Hesse, spoke on the coronavirus pandemic. She condemned the “profits before lives” policy of all the parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament), which had officially cost 93,000 lives in Germany alone. She then explained the scientific strategy and political perspective needed to stop the mass deaths.

“Ending the pandemic and saving lives requires the implementation of consistent lockdowns, coupled with vaccinations, contact tracing and the isolation of infected individuals until COVID-19 is eradicated,” Arens explained. She added that the SGP demands “Full wage replacement for all affected workers, as well as real assistance for the self-employed and comprehensive support for poor households; a globally coordinated vaccination programme instead of vaccine nationalism and profiteering.”

Dietmar Gaisenkersting, candidate for the SGP in North Rhine-Westphalia, made clear in his speech that the conditions for implementing a socialist programme are ripening. He said he had “never experienced a federal election campaign in the course of which so many strikes and protests have taken place.” The struggles, he said, were “part of a growing international mobilization of the working class.”

Gaisenkersting provided an impressive overview of the SGP’s interventions in the class struggle. “We were at the strikes and demonstrations of the nurses at Vivantes and Charité and the Gorillas

delivery workers in Berlin, spoke to Dana workers in Essen and at many picket lines of the train drivers and conductors.”

In discussions with workers, he said, SGP members and supporters emphasized one point above all: “Workers can only defend their wages and jobs and achieve their legitimate demands if they organize themselves in rank-and-file committees independent of the unions and establishment parties.”

For this reason, he said, on May 1 the International Committee of the Fourth International had called for building the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). “By building an international network of workers’ committees, we want to initiate and develop a global counteroffensive of the working class—an offensive against the murderous policies of the ruling capitalist class and its governments on the question of the coronavirus pandemic, as well as against the attacks by the corporations in the wake of the pandemic.”

Against this background, the speeches of the international comrades were particularly significant.

Joseph Kishore, national secretary of the SEP in the US, reported, “In the United States, the centre of world capitalism, workers and youth confront the same issues.” In the midst of a massive surge of the pandemic, Kishore said, there were more than 150,000 new infections and about 2,000 coronavirus deaths a day. Across the country, hospitals were again overcrowded.

“The impact of the pandemic both arises out of and is enormously intensifying a thoroughgoing crisis of the entire social and political order in the United States,” he said. It was only eight months ago, that “the president of the United States sought to orchestrate a fascist insurrection to stop the transfer of power and establish a personalist dictatorship.” Now, the Democrats were “covering up the seriousness of the danger, leaving the outcome of the conflict in the hands of the military and intelligence agencies.”

In fact, Biden was continuing Trump’s policies on all key issues, he said. “Under Biden’s watch, the pandemic is once again spiralling out of control, while the same core policies are being enforced everywhere.” Democrats, he said, were “spearheading the reopening of schools,” pushing through ferocious social attacks such as cutting unemployment benefits and stepping up the war offensive against China after US imperialism’s debacle in Afghanistan.

“Biden signed an agreement with the UK and Australia to escalate the war drive against China. Nuclear-powered submarines will be sent to Australia, and nuclear weapons will inevitably follow. The catastrophe of the ‘war on terror’ is to be followed by the even greater catastrophe of ‘great power conflict.’ If Trump was threatening war with China in his final days in office, Biden is preparing for this war from the first days of his.”

However, the American ruling class “confronts its greatest adversary at home,” Kishore stressed. “The bill for the decades-long growth of social inequality, facilitated by the trade unions, is coming due. This now intersects with the impact and consequences of the pandemic and the criminal policy implemented by the ruling class over the past 18 months. Teachers, parents, health care workers, service workers, transportation and logistics workers, and the entire working class are striving for a way to fight the pandemic and a social system that has proven so incapable of responding to it.”

To do this, he said, political leadership must be developed and the Fourth International built throughout the world. This, he said, was “the essential lesson of this whole experience. None of the big issues facing humanity, whether it is the pandemic, the threat of war, the rise

of fascism and dictatorship, social inequality, climate change—none of them can be tackled without the development of a mass socialist movement in the working class.”

Chris Marsden, SEP national secretary in the UK, said that developments in Britain also “illustrate the basic issues shaping the class struggle and underscoring the fundamental need to build a new socialist leadership in the working class.” He said that the British ruling elite was “committed to a policy of letting the virus rip through the population, no matter the cost in suffering and human lives.”

Marsden reported that the Johnson government had “conducted a closed-door ‘cost-benefit analysis’ that declared 50,000 deaths a year was preferable to a renewed lockdown.” The truth, he said, was that even “100,000 deaths or more would meet the same refusal to act by this gang of criminals and murderers.”

The Labour Party and British trade unions supported this murderous course. The working class everywhere, he said, “confronts increasingly right-wing and authoritarian governments intent on imposing savage austerity.” At the same time, they are being “saddled with trade unions and political leaders who act as a fifth column on behalf of the major banks and corporations.”

At the end of his contribution, Marsden stressed the need for a common struggle of the European working class under the banner of the Fourth International. “The SEP, the SGP, and our comrades in France and Turkey, seek to unify the working class throughout the continent against austerity, authoritarian rule, the rise of the far right, militarism and war and for the United Socialist States of Europe. That is the only perspective, and we are the only leadership, that offers a future for the working class that is worth fighting for.”

The final contribution was of particular importance. SGP Chairman **Ulrich Rippert** spoke on the founding 50 years ago of the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (BSA), the forerunner of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei. We have already published the speech in its entirety on the WSWs, so we will not summarize and quote it in detail here.

Rippert’s speech made one thing clear above all: The political strength of the rally, as well as the SGP’s entire campaign, is based on the historical tradition and principles of the Fourth International, which defended the Marxist programme of socialist internationalism against both Stalinism and social democracy.

With the foundation of the BSA as the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International on September 18 and 19, 1971, the continuity of Marxism and Trotskyism was resumed in Germany. Fifty years later, it takes on decisive importance for the future political development in Germany, throughout Europe and worldwide.



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