

“A vote for the SGP is a vote against war and capitalist barbarism!”

Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei holds final election rally in Berlin

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On February 15, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) successfully held its final election rally in Berlin. The SGP is running in the early federal elections on February 23 to oppose the all-party coalition for war and social cuts and to build an international movement against war and capitalism together with its sister parties.

In his introductory remarks, Johannes Stern, editor-in-chief of the German edition of the *World Socialist Web Site* and moderator of the rally, emphasised “how necessary and urgent” the socialist perspective of the SGP and the Fourth International is. In the US, “The ruling class is relying on the fascist Trump to advance its programme of social counterrevolution, mass deportations, dictatorship and imperialist plunder and world war in the interests of the oligarchy.”

And a corresponding development was “also taking place here. With the early federal elections, the ruling class in Germany is pursuing the goal of bringing an extreme right-wing government to power that will enforce the interests of German capital even more brutally both internally and externally.”

He castigated the election campaign being conducted by all the parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament) as a “repulsive spectacle” with their anti-refugee agitation, calls for massive rearmament and ingratiation of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) into official politics. The SGP rally, Stern said, would counter this threatening development, show what the objective driving forces behind it were and explain what needed to be done.

The first speaker to address the 50 or so rally participants was Christoph Vandreier, chairman and lead candidate of the SGP, who spoke at length about rearmament and war policy. “The worst warmongers are the former pacifists of the Greens,” he said. “But it is the entire coalition government that has taken war policy to the extreme here, that is sending German tanks against Russia again, 80 years after the Nazi war of extermination, and that has returned to the methods of genocide in Gaza!”

Just as 80 years ago, today it was also “about economic interests and geostrategic interests!”

The war madness, Vandreier said, was being financed on the backs of the workers. Massive cuts in education, housing and health and the armaments for a trade war would lead to hundreds of thousands of redundancies in industry and an extreme reduction in real wages.

“Workers who already don’t know how they are going to pay for their groceries at the end of the month are receiving wage cuts of up to 20 percent or even being thrown out on the street,” said Vandreier.

“And this is exactly when the discussion about cutting Bürgergeld (welfare payments) takes place. In other words, first workers are thrown onto the streets and then their unemployment benefits are cut.”

“We are not simply experiencing the bankruptcy of one policy or another. We are experiencing the bankruptcy of an entire social system. We are experiencing the bankruptcy of capitalism.”

To loud applause, Vandreier ended his speech with a strong appeal to build the SGP in order to declare war on the all-party coalition and the entire capitalist system. “A vote for the SGP is a vote against war and capitalist barbarism and a vote for the socialist future.”

The deputy chairman of the SGP, Dietmar Gaisenkersting, who is running as an independent constituency candidate in Duisburg, spoke about the enormous attacks on social support systems and jobs that are now being prepared to finance the pro-war policy.

“The high earners in the Bundestag and the party leaderships, the entrepreneurs, managers, billionaires, oligarchs, they don’t need anything like public health insurance, unemployment insurance or pension insurance. They also don’t need public schools, libraries or leisure facilities.” The working class is being made to “finance armament and war with the impending social cuts! At the same time, the corporations, supported by the trade union apparatuses, will enforce a jobs massacre and wage cuts on a scale that we have not seen since the end of the Second World War.”

Gaisenkersting outlined how the trade unions and works councils insist that “economic conditions make job cuts and wage reductions necessary in order to reduce production costs. But these economic conditions have a name: Capitalism!”

At the end of his speech, Gaisenkersting called for the formation of rank-and-file action committees to fight against the dictates of the trade union bureaucracy. His explanation that action committees were “controlled by the rank and file and answerable only to them” attracted a great deal of attention. “The action committees must overcome the division of the workforce into permanent and temporary employees and different locations, and must also network with the action committees in other plants and other countries.”

Katja Rippert, a member of the SGP national committee, spoke next. She welcomed the audience, and especially people of migrant backgrounds, who had persevered despite the bitter cold.

She sharply denounced the extreme anti-refugee propaganda of the Bundestag parties in the current election campaign: “Anyone with a so-called migration background or, even worse, a refugee background is treated like a leper and a criminal.” All the establishment parties were indulging in vile anti-refugee rhetoric and right-wing slogans and

were calling for more deportations and the creation of a police state.

“And the Left Party?” she asked. Wherever it co-governs, especially in Thuringia, it had “rigorously deported refugees.”

“While it was the Jews under the Nazis, today it is the refugees and migrants who are constantly being agitated against and kicked in the teeth,” Rippert said. “The targets today are also the same as under the Nazis. Whenever the ruling class agitates against foreigners, it is essentially pursuing two goals: The division of the working class and the establishment of a police state.”

Rippert, referring to the Red Army, which had ended the Second World War and Nazi rule 80 years ago this May, said millions of people still wondered how the crimes of the Holocaust and world war were possible. “This is no longer a question that belongs to the distant past. It’s a burning actuality today.” But “unlike in 1933, workers today are not defeated. Explosive struggles lie ahead. But they can only be successful if they have a clear political leadership and a strategy, the strategy of socialist internationalism. This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei is fighting for.”

Tamino Wilck, who spoke on behalf of the IYSSE, the SGP’s youth and student movement, placed the massive cuts to education in the context of rearmament. The attacks on the public education system were once again turning universities into “centres for the ideological preparation of war,” as was the case before the First and Second World Wars, while resorting to historical falsification. At the same time, opponents of the genocide in Gaza were often mercilessly persecuted at universities and threatened with expulsion.

What workers and young people could expect from this pro-war policy could be seen in Ukraine. Wilck described how hundreds of thousands of young men there were being physically consumed for imperialism.

“While the Ukrainian army is already falling apart due to mass desertions, those who oppose this war madness are being locked away in Ukraine,” Wilck continued. “Our comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk has been locked up in a Ukrainian high-security prison for almost 10 months because he rejects the war and is in favour of uniting the Ukrainian and Russian working classes.”

He called on all those gathered to sign the petition for Bogdan and to make the fight for his freedom the spearhead of the struggle for democratic rights.

Finally, SGP Honorary Chairman Ulrich Rippert addressed the participants. He focussed on the question: “What is the basis of our conviction that, despite warmongering, xenophobia and massive social attacks, we are on the eve of struggles that will revolutionise society, overthrow capitalism and bring about a humane, socialist society?”

“The first source of our confidence is the enormous, objective power of the international working class. It is the strongest social force,” emphasised Rippert. “The second source of our confidence is the objectivity of the class struggle. It is not possible to drive millions, hundreds of millions, billions of people into hardship and misery without mass resistance and revolt.”

And the third source of confidence, according to Rippert, was the “strength of the historical tradition” embodied by the SGP. The working class must “build on its own history,” on its great struggles under the revolutionary Marxists Luxemburg and Liebknecht, on the struggles and analyses of Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition and the Fourth International, and build a new socialist leadership on this basis.

The rally elicited a strong response from the participants. The denunciation of social austerity in favour of increased arms spending

spoke to many from the heart. And in particular the defence of democratic rights and the necessary unity of the international working class, which the speakers emphasised, met with strong support.

The well-stocked Mehring Verlag book table, with its selection of Marxist and Trotskyist literature, also met with lively interest. It was clear to many participants that there is an urgent need to become active themselves and familiarise themselves with the history of the socialist labour movement.

As one Berlin pensioner said in conversation: “Poor people have worked all their lives and instead of being able to enjoy their old age, they live in poverty. Pensioners like me and many people in my neighbourhood are suffering badly from inflation.”

She angrily declared, “The limit has been reached, it’s unreasonable. What’s happening has nothing to do with human dignity. Is this supposed to be democracy? Who voted in favour of war spending? Nobody! I’ve been thinking for a long time about who I can vote for. What you say here sounds good. I’ll read your election brochure and vote for you if I like the programme.”

Jürgen, who worked as a German teacher abroad for many years and now works as a German teacher for migrants in Berlin, said he had “seen that people everywhere have the same problem—social insecurity. In capitalism, people are always told that it’s their own fault if they can’t climb the ladder, that some even feel ashamed if they don’t make it. But it’s the economic system.” He had never heard of the SGP before and said he now wanted to study its election programme in detail.

Mohamed, who is almost 40 years old, was particularly impressed by the proposal to set up action committees in companies to fight against social attacks and the trade union bureaucracy. He was also very impressed by Ulrich Rippert’s closing speech, in which Rippert explained how Hitler could have been prevented. Mohamed summed up, “You have to learn this history in order to fight against the AfD today”.

Andy, a 50-year-old worker, was particularly impressed by the analysis of the Left Party and the Greens. He had “never thought that the Left Party would be so right-wing and that they would defend Israel and not side with the Palestinians.” He said he was shocked by the fact that the Left Party was actually a war party that “is also in favour of the war in Ukraine.” He concluded that “I would never have voted for the Left Party if I had already known the SGP.”



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