

SGP in the Berlin state election: “We embody the revolutionary, socialist and internationalist traditions of the working class”

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The following contribution was delivered by Ulrich Rippert, Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) honorary chairman, in the party's first video for the Berlin state elections

I am glad to be speaking at our election campaign launch meeting.

Comrade Christoph Vandreier has already made vividly clear that the Berlin state election is taking place in a completely changed political situation. Nothing is as it was before. The capitalist system is in an advanced stage of collapse. Not only here—but worldwide!

Not a day goes by without fresh announcements of mass layoffs and plant closures, wage cuts and social spending cuts. AI and modern technology are being used to destroy ever more jobs and to drive exploitation to immeasurable extremes. But in doing so, capitalism—which is based on the exploitation of wage labour—is destroying the very foundation of its own existence.

The ruling class is responding to this historic crisis just as it did in 1914 and 1939—with war and dictatorship.

I do not want to repeat what has already been said. But one really has to ask: have they lost their minds in the Chancellery and at City Hall, the seat of Berlin's governing mayor? Have they forgotten what Berlin—what Germany and Europe—looked like at the end of the Second World War? Have they forgotten the images from Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

The present war hysteria, which permeates every pore of propaganda and politics, is an expression of the desperation that has gripped the ruling class in the face of the historic crisis of the capitalist system.

After the last world war—when the ruling class in Germany, through its Nazi dictatorship, committed the greatest crimes in human history—capitalism survived for only two reasons.

First, because the United States came to its aid and financed reconstruction with billions in credit. And second, because workers' revolutionary struggles were suppressed by the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. Neither of these exists any longer!

The decades of the postwar order were marked by close transatlantic cooperation. President John F. Kennedy rode together with Mayor Willy Brandt through the streets of West Berlin. At Schöneberg Town Hall, Kennedy called out before a cheering crowd: “Ich bin ein Berliner!” (“I am a Berliner!”)

Today, the centre of the capitalist world crisis lies in the United States. Today, a gangster named Trump sits in the White House in Washington, representing the reactionary interests of an oligarchy of multibillionaires. The brutality and fascistic methods of his policies are growing ever worse.

Transatlantic cooperation has turned into transatlantic confrontation, with a tariff and trade war. To MAGA (Make America Great Again), the German government responds with the battle cry “Deutschland über

alles!” and presents itself as Europe's leading military power.

But if the federal government believes it can simply repeat the war terror of the past two world wars, it is mistaken. As the previous speaker has already shown, resistance is growing worldwide.

I believe many of those here listening in today have already had the experience that, when speaking with colleagues or relatives and acquaintances, one keeps encountering the same words: “Things simply cannot go on like this!” Everyone senses not only the threat, but the unease. A tremendous social upheaval is in the air.

Many workers are asking themselves: what can be done against the insane rearmament and growing drive towards war, against the continuing wave of mass layoffs, and against the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the return of the fascist threat?

It is becoming ever clearer that the fight against war requires a fight against capitalism, and that this demands a socialist programme and an international strategy. In the face of the growing resistance from workers and young people, all the establishment parties are drawing closer together and circling the wagons politically.

The Left Party is calling for cooperation with the CDU (Christian Democratic Union), while a large part of the CDU and its Bavarian sister party the CSU (Christian Social Union) are already cooperating with the AfD. They are united in a party of war, social cuts and dictatorship, which stretches from the Left Party to the AfD. For the working class, this means that great class battles have already begun. The Berlin state election must be seen in connection with the beginning of a tremendous counteroffensive against the government and its all-party alliance.

Today, I want to speak about only one question. In our election statement we say:

“Just as the ruling class is reviving its reactionary traditions of imperialism, war and fascism, the working class must revive its revolutionary, socialist and internationalist traditions.”

What does that mean? What do we mean by it?

The Berlin state election coincides with an important anniversary. Thirty-five years ago—in 1991—the Soviet Union was dissolved. Two years earlier the Berlin Wall had already fallen, and German reunification had taken place.

At the time, this was accompanied by a deafening propaganda campaign. On every channel—in the media, on television, on the radio, at universities, on every stage and from every pulpit—it was claimed that socialism had failed and capitalism had triumphed. It was claimed that freedom, democracy and prosperity for all were now beginning.

But in reality, the fall of the Berlin Wall—the post-1989 reintroduction of capitalist relations in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the GDR (East

Germany)—was something entirely different. Thousands of enterprises were shut down. Hundreds of thousands lost their jobs, their incomes and, often, every form of social security. Thousands of libraries and cultural institutions were closed—every social achievement that had once existed in the GDR and the Soviet Union was smashed.

Today—faced with mass layoffs and war—the memory of the social devastation of that period is returning.

A few days ago—at the beginning of the month—employees at the Kelvion machine factory in Thuringia began an indefinite all-out strike. They are seeking to prevent the relocation of production and the closure of the plant. The roughly 300 employees at the Thuringia plant manufacture heat exchangers. Kelvion has more than 3,000 employees in total.

The IG Metall union is trying to prevent the strike from spreading, fearing it could trigger a chain reaction. The strikers, for their part, have already begun reaching out to their colleagues at other sites.

What is significant about this strike is that an interesting discussion has begun among the workers, one that is partly reflected on social media. One female worker reports that many remember their experiences from the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, because the whole thing feels like déjà vu. Back then, everything here was flattened too, she says. “Back then we made a mistake and allowed all of that to happen. We must not make that mistake again today.”

In other words: to fight successfully today, the lessons of the past must be drawn. If one wants to understand what “went wrong”, so to speak, 35 years ago, and what the mistakes were at the time, one has to answer the question: what is socialism, and why were the GDR and the Soviet Union not socialism, but Stalinist regimes in which, while there were certain social improvements, the working class was suppressed? Thirty-five years ago, it was not socialism that collapsed, but Stalinism.

Everyone knows, of course, that the cradle of socialism stood here in Germany. The ideas of Marx and Engels won great influence here among the working class. The *Communist Manifesto* became the foundation for building the first great socialist workers' party. Its leaders—August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht—awakened the working class to political life.

At the time, workers were highly conscious of their role in society and of their economic and political power. They knew that it was they who created all of society's wealth, and they also knew that a general strike by all workers would very quickly make clear who actually keeps society running.

The early revolutionary socialist, that is, Marxist workers' movement was highly successful. Everything that exists in this country in the way of democratic and social rights was created by the working class under revolutionary, Marxist leadership. The democratic structures—universal, equal and general suffrage; public education and the modern school system; freedom of opinion and of the press against censorship; and also social insurance and the state pension system—all of this was created through the early struggles of the workers.

The ruling class always stood on the side of reaction, supporting the Kaiser and his authoritarian state. Later, in the Weimar period, once the monarchy had been overthrown by the working class in the 1918 November Revolution and the question of working class power was on the agenda, the industrial barons and the banks financed the Nazi Party and brought Hitler to power in 1933.

If one asks today why the ruling class and its government are once again so ruthlessly abolishing basic democratic rights and building a brutal police state that paves the way for the far right, the answer is this: they are doing so because the bourgeois class in this country has no democratic traditions whatsoever and has always stood on the side of reaction.

As I said: the early Marxist Social Democratic Party (SPD) under August Bebel was highly successful and won basic democratic structures and workers' rights. But with its success a strong opportunist current grew within the SPD, one that argued for a gradual transition to socialism

and rejected a revolutionary seizure of power by the working class.

That is how it came about that the SPD leadership at the decisive moment at the start of the First World War in 1914—when the question of war or revolution was on the agenda—capitulated and voted for the Kaiser's war credits. This was a fundamental betrayal and a shock for the working class, the effects of which lasted for a long time.

Since then, the SPD has been a loyal pillar of capitalist rule and has played a key role in every subsequent crisis of capitalism in suppressing the revolutionary struggles of the workers and securing bourgeois rule.

Today, the SPD is one of the main war parties. It sits in government with the CDU/CSU. Its defence minister tours the country demanding Germany be made “war ready”, while the SPD finance minister organises social devastation that far outstrips that of “Agenda 2010”. Together with the trade union bureaucracy, the SPD is pushing through mass layoffs and social spending cuts.

Today, the SPD is rightly hated by millions of workers.

With the SPD's betrayal of 1914, the leadership of the workers' revolutionary struggle shifted to Russia. The Bolshevik Party, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, drew the correct and furthest-reaching conclusions from the SPD's betrayal. They demonstrated that the very same contradictions of capitalism that lead to war also lead to revolution. And when the tsarist system collapsed in early 1917, they were prepared: they seized power and established the first workers' state.

This was a tremendous achievement. The Russian Revolution inspired and mobilised millions of workers around the world. New revolutionary communist parties were founded.

The Russian Revolution was the beginning of the world revolution. It could not survive within a national framework. And when the revolution spread to Germany and the November Revolution began, it was the Social Democratic government under Ebert and Noske that strangled the revolution and murdered the leaders of the young German Communist Party, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

After the initial wave of revolution was halted, the capitalist countries attacked the first workers' state on 14 fronts, exerting massive economic, political and military pressure on it.

It was under this pressure from the capitalist countries that Stalinism emerged.

Within the revolutionary party and the state apparatus of the Soviet Union, a privileged layer developed that abolished workers' democracy and established a bureaucratic dictatorship. Against the Marxist position of socialist internationalism, which Karl Marx had set out in the *Communist Manifesto* with the slogan “Workers of all countries, unite!”, Stalin advanced the nationalist position of building “socialism in one country”. On this nationalist basis, Stalinism developed into the most important counter-revolutionary force within the working class.

Trotsky, who alongside Lenin was the most important leader of the Russian Revolution, now built up the Left Opposition, that is, the socialist opposition to Stalinism. Within the Soviet Union, a virtual civil war developed. Tens of thousands of revolutionary workers and intellectuals were convicted on false charges and murdered during the Moscow show trials of the 1930s. Trotsky himself was murdered by a Stalinist agent in 1940.

But two years earlier, he founded the Fourth International, which continued the fight to defend the socialist perspective and drew the lessons from the betrayals of both social democracy and Stalinism.

In Germany—here in Berlin—Stalinism had especially disastrous consequences. It was Stalin's theory of “social fascism”—the branding of the Social Democrats as “social fascists”—that split the working class and thereby paved Hitler's way to power. Trotsky and the Left Opposition tirelessly fought against this and for a united front—that is, for a joint mobilisation of all workers—through which Hitler and the Nazi terror could have been prevented.

After 1945, the Stalinists once again played a key role in disarming the workers and preventing a revolutionary uprising. At the same time, the reactionary policies pursued by the Stalinist governments in the name of socialism served to fuel anti-communist sentiments.

But as long as the Soviet Union existed, it still exerted pressure on capitalism—even under the conditions of its Stalinist degeneration. Many of the postwar reforms were the product of the Soviet Union's very existence.

But the contradiction between the nationalist policy of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the increasing globalisation of production followed a relentless logic. The Soviet Union had to be integrated into the world market.

We Trotskyists stated very clearly at the time: there were only two possibilities. Either the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union would be overthrown by the working class in a political revolution and the world revolution begun in 1917 would be carried forward, or capitalist relations would be restored in the Soviet Union and in all the countries under its influence.

Out of fear of the working class in the Soviet Union and worldwide, the Stalinist bureaucracy fled into the arms of imperialism, smashed up the state property and re-established capitalist relations, with devastating consequences for the working class.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union set in motion a process in which the leading capitalist powers—above all the United States—deployed their military might to assert their dominant positions as world powers. One war followed another.

Today's situation—in which the war in Ukraine is ever more clearly becoming a NATO staging ground in a war against Russia, the genocide in Gaza, the war against Iran, the preparations for war in the Pacific against China, and the US military intervention in Latin America—is the form in which the Third World War is developing. This process began with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The very same driving forces of the world economy that triggered the collapse of the Soviet Union are also acting on the capitalist states and are leading either to world war or world revolution.

This is why the conscious political intervention of the working class is so important, and why it must be understood that what collapsed 35 years ago was not socialism, but Stalinism. For socialism is not the past, but the future.

You may ask me, why I am speaking about history at such length when this is supposed to be about the Berlin state election campaign.

The answer is simple: the election is taking place at a time when all the ghosts of the past have returned. The historic crisis of capitalism is taking ever sharper forms. Mass layoffs are reaching a scale not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The ruling class is once again turning to war, social cuts and dictatorship.

Not a single problem in Berlin state or federal politics can be solved without breaking the power of the financial aristocracy and its banks and corporations. The working class must prepare for revolutionary struggles. For this, it needs a revolutionary socialist party. We are that party. We are Trotskyists.

The strength of our party and our confidence stem from the fact that we have drawn the lessons of history. For many years, we have fought without compromise against every form of opportunism and nationalism, defending the international socialist programme that is gaining ever greater significance today.

Make this election campaign a powerful political offensive! Study our election statement and the SGP's programme and become a member of our party! Distribute and discuss our election statement with friends, colleagues and acquaintances! Vote SGP on 20 September and make the Berlin state election the starting point of a rebellion against the policies of war and social devastation!



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