

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei election result in the Berlin state election

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The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) received 716 votes in the Berlin state election held September 20. That is more than in the previous two elections, but it carries no weight in terms of electoral arithmetic. Since the election, we have repeatedly been asked how we assess this result, so we want to set out our position on it in principle.

As Marxists, we know that the future of society and the solution to society's great problems will be decided not in parliament, but in the class struggle. We are not a parliamentary party, but a revolutionary party. We are building the political leadership that the working class needs to overthrow the dictatorship of the financial aristocracy and the entire capitalist profit system.

We use elections and any seats we might win as a platform for the class struggle. That is why we placed the fight against the madness of war, social attacks and mass layoffs at the centre of our election campaign. In our statement on the Berlin elections we wrote:

War and militarism cannot be combated through pacifist appeals to the warmongers but only by stripping them of their power. The policy of war is not simply the result of wrong decisions by individual politicians. It stems from the deep crisis of capitalism, which, as in the 20th century, is once again leading to war and barbarism.

Workers have nothing to gain from war but everything to lose. We therefore oppose growing nationalism and war with the international unity of the working class. Instead of allowing themselves to be pitted against one another and shooting at one another, workers must unite across all borders in the struggle against capitalism.

Right at the start of the election campaign, news came from Mykolaiv that our comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk had been sentenced to 15 years in prison for advancing precisely this perspective in articles he had written for the *World Socialist Web Site*, rejecting the war and criticising the glorification of Nazi collaborators. We immediately linked our election campaign to the fight for his freedom, because his case brought all the central questions of the election into sharp focus—the reactionary character of the NATO war, the connection between war and attacks on democratic rights and the only viable perspective with which the madness of war can

be stopped.

On September 1, exactly 87 years after Hitler's invasion of Poland, the German government accused Russia of an attempted terrorist attack in Leipzig, without presenting any verifiable evidence. It closed the Russian House and the Consulate General in Bonn, severing the last cultural and diplomatic bridges. The SGP immediately published statements and videos and took up these questions at its central rally for Bogdan Syrotiuk's freedom in front of the Brandenburg Gate on September 6.

Elections were held in Saxony-Anhalt on the same day, in which the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) won 43.8 percent of the vote and could determine who was the next state premier. We responded that same evening with an initial statement and made clear that the main responsibility for this electoral success lies with the Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens, the Left Party and the trade unions, which block every progressive way out of the crisis and suppress workers' resistance.

The AfD did not fall from the sky but is the sharpest expression of the shift to the right by all the establishment parties. It was deliberately built up to enforce the policy of war and cuts with the utmost brutality and with fascist methods. "The AfD cannot be stopped by an alliance with the parties that paved the way for it," we declared in a leaflet. "The AfD can only be stopped by an independent offensive of the working class, directed against war, social cuts and their underlying cause, capitalism."

On this basis, we sharply opposed the Left Party, which presented itself in the Berlin state election campaign as a social alternative. We traced the history and record of a party that had already organised the restoration of capitalism in East Germany, pushed through the most severe social attacks in Berlin and finally voted in the upper house of the federal parliament for the trillion-euro rearmament programme. We showed that the Left Party pursues this right-wing agenda because it defends capitalism, which is once again leading to fascism and war.

In the thousands of discussions we held during the campaign, we met many workers and young people who wanted to vote for the Left Party but also found that very few of them believed this would actually change anything. Our position on the Left Party, by contrast, met with a great response. A video in which our candidate Andy Niklaus polemicised against the Left Party and explained these questions gained more than 800,000 viewers and drew more than 42,000 likes and almost 2,000 comments.

Other videos on the escalation of war policy, the genocide in

Gaza and the rise of the AfD also reached an enormous audience. In total, our videos were viewed well over 2 million times during the campaign, with more than 100,000 likes and more than 10,000 comments. We experienced a similar response at the numerous information tables we organised, at our rallies and on the doorstep. Rejection of the war policy and anger at all the parties were ever-present.

This response is of great political significance and points to an objective change in the class struggle. David North articulated this change at the August congress of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the United States:

The metastatic spread of the imperialist war finds its dialectical antipode in the global expansion of the class struggle. Its growth proceeds, in the term Trotsky applied to the maturation of revolutionary consciousness, molecularly, beneath the surface of official politics, in millions of individual experiences of exploitation, war and state violence that accumulate silently until they find collective expression with a force that takes every government by surprise. Where the war divides the world into fronts, the class struggle unites it.

This very stage of development of the class struggle is also expressed in the election result. Under conditions of enormous anger at cuts and war and a molecular growth of the class struggle, we receive a great response but still win few votes. The vote for the revolutionary party remains limited because the class struggle has not yet taken on open, collective forms: there are not yet mass demonstrations and strikes, or workplace occupations.

The gap between response and election result expresses the objective gap between the enormously acute situation—the ruthless escalation of the war and the historic social attacks—and political consciousness in the working class. Although rejection of war and of policies in the interests of the wealthy is widespread, a political understanding of this development and a socialist perspective are lacking. Under these circumstances, questions of electoral tactics dominated, along with the hope that changes could still be brought about through parliamentary shifts. This attitude is expressed in the Left Party's election victory in Berlin, but also in the high results for the AfD. Open class struggles would quickly expose the class character of these tendencies.

And these struggles are developing. In France, school students are occupying their schools, public sector workers are on strike and mass protests against the cuts take place daily. The ruling class is reacting extremely nervously and is proceeding with the utmost brutality against the school students. At the same time, it is escalating the conflict with the nuclear power Russia to an extreme degree and is rearming on a scale not seen since the Second World War. The German government keeps announcing new austerity packages and, following the jobs massacre in which 75,000 positions were axed, Volkswagen has announced massive wage cuts.

Under these conditions, the analyses and perspectives which the

SGP fought for in the Berlin state election are of the greatest importance. We have clarified the political questions that are decisive in the present crisis: that war cannot be stopped by appeals to the warmongers, but only by stripping the ruling class of its power; that the AfD cannot be stopped by alliances with the parties that paved its way, but only by the independent mobilisation of the working class; and that the Left Party is not an alternative to capitalism, but its left-wing prop. These clarifications are not academic questions. They are the precondition for the growing anger over war and social cuts to find a political expression that genuinely threatens the ruling class, rather than being diverted into the dead ends of the Left Party or the AfD.

The Bolsheviks, too, had a very modest number of supporters before the revolution. In the years before 1917, the Bolshevik Party was a small, often isolated organisation, persecuted and slandered by the official labour movement. What was decisive was not its numerical strength, but that Lenin and Trotsky had fought the decisive struggles against the opportunism of the Second International, which in 1914 lined up behind its own bourgeoisies; against the national orientation that drove the working class into the trenches of the imperialist war; and for the permanent revolution, which alone opened up the perspective of the conquest of power by the working class.

Precisely because they had waged these struggles and clarified the political questions, they laid the foundation for winning the majority of the working class as the revolution came to a head. The history of the Fourth International is the continuation of precisely this struggle—the clarification of political questions, against opportunism in all its forms, for the international unity of the working class and for the world socialist revolution.

From this standpoint, we will continue the important work of the election campaign and intervene on this basis. For us, the political struggle does not end on election night. The election was one moment in a much larger process—the building of the revolutionary party that the working class needs to lead the struggles now maturing. It is now crucial to build the SGP—in workplaces, at schools and universities, and in the neighbourhoods.



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