

For social equality. For the United Socialist States of Europe. Vote PSG.

Statement of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) on the 2005 German elections

29 June 2005

The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG) will stand its own candidates in at least four states in the upcoming national election in Germany. The PSG is the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

On May 22, following a disastrous defeat for the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the state election in North Rhine Westphalia, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder of the SPD announced early elections for the federal parliament (Bundestag). It is widely expected that the elections will be held September 18.

In order to participate in the election, the PSG must, by the beginning of August, present 2,000 confirmed signatures in every state where it is standing. Teams have begun to collect signatures in Berlin, Saxony, North Rhine Westphalia and Hesse, and have received an enthusiastic response.

Below is the election statement issued by the PSG.

The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) is standing candidates in the German parliamentary elections scheduled for this autumn. The party will put up slates in four states: Berlin, Saxony, North Rhine Westphalia and Hesse.

We are participating in the election in order to lay the basis for the building of a new party that represents the interests of working people, pensioners, the unemployed and youth.

We oppose the cuts in social spending that are supported by all of the parties represented in Germany's parliament, the Bundestag, and stand on a principle fundamentally opposed to that of the major parties: we say that the needs of the population must take precedence over the profits of big business and the employers.

We strive for a socialist society based on the principles of social equality and justice. This is possible only through the international unification of the working class and the overcoming of all national, ethnic and religious divisions. Our goal is the establishment of the United Socialist States of Europe.

In this election, the working class confronts not only the bankruptcy of the Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green Party coalition government, but a historical crisis of the capitalist system.

The globalization of production and the growing conflict between the national state system and world economy have brought to a head all of the unresolved problems and contradictions of the past century. The war in Iraq and that country's brutal military occupation are only the beginning. The American government is seeking to redivide the world in the interests of US imperialism and establish a global order based on the most flagrant forms of capitalist plunder and exploitation.

Under this pressure, the European Union is breaking apart. It is being stripped of any progressive semblance and revealing its nature as an instrument of big business for carrying out devastating attacks on social

conditions. Unemployment, poverty and social inequality go hand in hand with the dismantling of democratic rights and systematic military rearmament. Europe is once again becoming the theatre for bitter national conflicts, raising once again the spectre of world war—as though nothing had been learned from the carnage of two such wars in the last century.

We are participating in the elections in order to prepare the way for a broad political movement directed against the capitalist system. Without the independent political intervention of working people throughout Europe, it is not possible to halt the tide of reaction and prevent a catastrophic outcome. The mass demonstrations against the Iraq war two years ago and the “no” vote against the European constitution in France and the Netherlands foreshadow the emergence of such a movement. But the working class can be unified only on the basis of a socialist programme and the construction of a European-wide party.

Not a single problem confronting working people in Germany or in any other country can be resolved within the national framework. Against the transnational corporations and financial giants, which play one location and workforce off against another, there can be only one defence: workers must develop their own international strategy based on solidarity and cooperation. Workers in Germany and the other industrialized countries must take responsibility for workers in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and other low-wage countries, whose desperate situation is exploited to depress wages everywhere else—just as, within Germany, low wages in the east have been used to hold down wages in the west.

For this reason we are resolute opponents of former SPD leader Oskar Lafontaine and his alliance between the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Election Alternative group (WASG). Lafontaine's recent warnings against *Fremdarbeiter* (a term used by the Nazis for foreign workers), whom he accuses of taking the jobs of German wage earners, were not a lapse on his part, but part of his programme. Lafontaine wants a strong, capitalistic Europe under Franco-German domination which can stand its ground against the rest of the world.

In his latest book he argues for a Franco-German confederation that can enable Europe “to protect its interests.” To this end, he is quite prepared to exploit xenophobic sentiments. He warns against the immigration of Muslims, whose higher birth rate, he maintains, endangers the cultural identity of Europe. With the same reasoning he opposes Turkey's entry into the European Union.

Attempts to defend jobs and wages by establishing a protective wall around one or several nations are as ineffective as they are reactionary. Globalization has undermined all national programmes. Some 15 years ago, the Stalinist bureaucracy in the former East Germany, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union collapsed when its nationalist policy and its doctrine of “socialism in a single country” ran up against the reality of

globalization. Now the same fate is gripping social democracy all over the world. Under conditions where it is no longer possible to carry out social reforms within the national framework, social democratic parties have gone over irrevocably to the side of big business.

Social democracy cannot be resurrected. Instead of trying to reanimate political programmes that have been refuted by reality, it is necessary to draw a political balance sheet and begin a serious debate about a socialist perspective. As the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the PSG embodies the tradition of the Trotskyist world movement that defended Marxism for decades against social democracy and Stalinism.

Chancellor Schröder's call for early elections is a declaration of political bankruptcy on the part of the SPD. The social democrats would rather hand power over to the conservative Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP) than deviate from the policy of social cutbacks laid down in the government's "Agenda 2010," which was drawn up in the boardrooms of the major corporations.

Schröder has given voters an ultimatum: "Either you accept Agenda 2010, Hartz IV and everything that goes with them, or you will get a CDU/CSU/FDP government that will be much worse." After six-and-a-half years in power, the SPD's claim that it represents the interests of oppressed social layers is thoroughly discredited.

Since taking office in autumn 1998, the Schröder government has carried out the most comprehensive attack on social and democratic rights since the establishment of the Federal Republic after the Second World War. If a CDU-led government had tried something similar, it would have met substantial resistance. The balance sheet of the government's social policies reads: over five million unemployed, twenty percent employed in the low-wage sector, one in seven households below the poverty line, the ranks of millionaires up from 510,000 to 775,000, 47 percent of society's wealth owned by the richest ten percent of the population while the bottom half has almost nothing.

The Schröder government has lowered the highest personal tax rate from 53 percent to 42 percent and cut the corporate tax from 42 percent to 25 percent, redistributing wealth to benefit the rich while emptying the public purse. This has resulted in massive debts at the local and state level, and the disintegration of educational, cultural and recreational facilities.

The attack on fundamental democratic rights that has taken place under the SPD-Green Party government is no less drastic. The authority of the secret services, police and federal border patrol over the population has been sharply expanded. There is hardly any personal information protected from the prying eyes and ears of the state. The separation of the police and secret services, which was anchored in the post-war German constitution following the experience of Hitler's Gestapo, has been all but abolished. Orwell's Big Brother state is rapidly becoming a reality.

Foreign workers and refugees are the main victims of this build-up of the state. They exist in a legal limbo. They are singled out in order to attack the rights of the entire population. Detention, the forced deportation of entire families, the arbitrary refusal to grant visas, deaths on the border and suicidal despair are facts of everyday life for refugees in Germany.

Finally, the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces)—until the 1990s constitutionally limited to a purely defensive role—are now being deployed all over the world. Under the previous government of CDU leader Helmut Kohl, the most senior military officer, general inspector Klaus Naumann, outlined a new strategy for the Bundeswehr, setting a clearly imperialist direction: the most important task of the German army was the "promotion and safe-guarding of international political, economic, military and ecological stability" and the "maintenance of free world trade and access to strategic raw materials." This programme became a reality under Chancellor Schröder and his Green Party foreign minister.

The rightward turn of the Greens is no less breathtaking than that of the SPD. Emerging from the remnants of the 1968 protest movement, their initial aims were declared to be the protection of the environment, rank-and-file democracy, pacifism, and, to a limited degree, social justice. But the Greens have always rejected any identification with the interests of the working class. Today, they represent that small layer of the middle class that has successfully climbed the social ladder. They express increasing hostility to any social demands coming from below. For them, the "reform" of the welfare state cannot proceed quickly enough or go far enough. Yesterday's pacifists have become today's proponents of a professional army that operates on a global scale.

Behind the political bankruptcy of the SPD-Green Party coalition lie fundamental changes in world economy.

Revolutionary innovations in the field of computer technology, telecommunications and transportation have created the basis for the development of the production process on a truly global scale. In itself, this represents enormous progress. For the first time it is possible to combine the productive energies of mankind worldwide and automate large parts of factory and clerical work. This enormous increase in human productive capacity has created the means to overcome poverty and backwardness across the globe and raise the general conditions of life for all.

But the opposite is taking place. The global economy is controlled by transnational corporations and international financial institutions scouring the world for cheap labour, low taxes and raw materials, playing off one country against another and exploiting low wages in China and other countries to push through lower wages and social standards all over the world. All human needs are subordinated to this struggle for profits and personal enrichment.

The capitalist corporations cannot organize production rationally since they must compete with one another and are subject to the vagaries of the market. The myth that the free play of market forces leads to social progress is daily disproved by reality. Social decay is spreading and whole regions of the world are sinking into indescribable poverty, while a small minority wallow in ostentatious luxury. The natural environment is being destroyed and tensions between the world powers are growing.

The more sharply social contradictions develop, the more decisively the reformist parties and trade unions move to the side of capital and proclaim the interests of workers and big business to be identical. Basing themselves on the so-called "national interest," they themselves organize the attacks on wages and social rights so as to, in the jargon of the unions, "defend Germany as an industrial location." The Schröder government justifies its Agenda 2010 by the necessity to "adapt the social market economy to the completely changed conditions of a globalized economy."

Globalization, however, has not only undermined the basis for the national reformist programme of social democracy, it has also created the objective conditions for an international offensive of the working class.

The number of working people—that is, those who can survive only by selling their labour power—has increased enormously on a world scale. Regions that fifty years ago were predominantly agrarian have become the work bench of the world. Despite social differences, working conditions are growing more similar. Workers all over the world are confronted by the same transnational corporations and the same pressure on wages and working conditions, and, thanks to modern communications, are better informed about world events than ever before.

The conditions facing the so-called middle classes—office workers, university graduates, the self-employed—hardly differ today from those of factory workers. They also confront worsening working conditions, sinking wages and economic insecurity.

Many people have turned away from their old, reformist organizations. The SPD has suffered a substantial decrease in members—losing approximately 300,000 since the beginning of the 1990s—and has lost

eleven state elections in a row. This is a result of growing opposition to a policy that subordinates all social needs to the demands of the markets and capital.

First and foremost, working class voters who formed the traditional base of the SPD have turned their backs on the party. The election debacle in North Rhine Westphalia was a prime example of this process. In its traditional stronghold, the SPD recorded its worst result in 50 years, losing its government majority in the state legislature for the first time in 39 years and receiving 40 percent fewer votes than in the 1998 federal election.

Opposition to government policy is increasingly developing outside the tried and tested, bureaucratically controlled channels. In the spring of 2004, the trade unions placed themselves at the head of large demonstrations against Agenda 2010—in order to agree to it afterwards in meetings with the chancellor. In the summer, however, protests arose against Hartz IV that signalled a broader movement unfolding for the first time outside the control of the unions and the major political parties.

The profound gulf between the working class and the political elite will continue to grow and deepen. There are millions of people all over the world—young people, workers, those in oppressed nations—who are not prepared to accept a future of unemployment, poverty, oppression and war. They will struggle for a better life. But these struggles must be prepared politically and theoretically. To resolve this task, the PSG is participating in the forthcoming election.

It is necessary to examine the creation of a “Party of the Left” led by Oskar Lafontaine and PDS leader Gregor Gysi from this standpoint. The function of such a party is precisely to suffocate any independent development of the working class. This party does not represent any genuine alternative to social democracy. Instead, it seeks to rescue social democracy—if not in its present incarnation in the form of the SPD, then in some other embodiment of a reformist and nationalist program. Lafontaine and Company pose as the advocates of the little man and loudly condemn the Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV cuts. But they decisively oppose both a genuinely independent political movement of the working class and a socialist reorganization of society.

Despite all his criticisms of Schröder’s neo-liberal policies, Lafontaine has made no secret of the fact that he is and remains a social democrat. He has justified his collaboration with the PDS on the basis that the PDS has professed its allegiance to “essential elements of a social democratic program,” i.e., “democracy and the free market economy, free enterprise and profit.” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 16, 2005). How one can possibly profess allegiance to free enterprise and profit while at the same time opposing social cuts remains Lafontaine’s secret.

In fact, this new party represents an alliance of the two major bureaucratic apparatuses—social democracy and Stalinism—which formed the political bedrock of the systems that prevailed in West Germany and East Germany during the post-war period.

The leading figures of the Election Alternative group (WASG) are long-time social democrats and trade union functionaries. For his part, Lafontaine can look back on a 39-year-long membership in the SPD, during which he emerged as an expert in the suppression of social conflicts.

As mayor of Saarbrücken, he pioneered the introduction of low-wage jobs schemes for those dependent on social welfare payments. As the head of government in the Saar, and in collaboration with the trade union IG Metall, he organized the dismantling of the steel and coal works in the region. In 1998, in his post as chairman of the SPD, Lafontaine was instrumental in securing the election victory of Schröder.

Shortly afterwards, following criticisms made by powerful business interests, he resigned from his posts as German finance minister and SPD chairman. Instead of taking up a fight and appealing to the population at large, he capitulated. It was clear that his main concern was to prevent at

all costs any popular mobilization against the government’s turn to a policy of austerity and social cutbacks.

For its part, the PDS took over the mantle of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), which, irrespective of its name, had nothing in common with socialism. As the ruling Stalinist party of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany), it defended the rule of a privileged layer of bureaucrats against any and all opposition by the working class.

In 1989, when mass demonstrations erupted in opposition to the East German regime, the SED/PDS ensured the smooth transition to a capitalist “free market” economy. Party leaders professed their allegiance to the bourgeois order. Thus was the PDS born.

Recalling this period, the last SED/PDS head of government in East Germany, Hans Modrow, wrote: “I saw my job as securing the governance of the country. In my opinion, the process of (German) unification was inevitable and had to be undertaken resolutely.”

Since then, the PDS has functioned in the eastern states as a prop and guarantor of the capitalist order. As was the case with the SED, the PDS pays lip service to socialism, but in practice little divides the party from the SPD and CDU. In their official governmental role on a state and local basis, PDS representatives have worked to impose a series of unpopular measures. The ruling SPD-PDS coalition in the city of Berlin leads the way when it comes to job destruction and cuts in wages and working conditions in the public service.

The PSG advances a program diametrically opposed to that of Lafontaine and the PDS. Our aim is not the revival of social democratic reformism, but rather the socialist reorganization of society. This can be realized only through an international political mass movement of the working class. We counterpose to the unification of Europe from above the unification of Europe from below. The only democratic and progressive alternative to the European Union is the United Socialist States of Europe.

A united socialist Europe would overcome the division of the continent into rival national states and harness Europe’s enormous wealth and productive capacity to develop society on behalf of all. It would enable the working class to confront US imperialism, and encourage the American working class to take on the warmongers in the White House. It would inspire oppressed peoples all over the world to mobilize against imperialism and clear out the oppressors in their own countries.

To this end we propose the following program:

For social equality

Jobs, pensions, health care and education are fundamental social rights. They must take priority over the profit interests of big business. The overcoming of mass unemployment requires a huge program of public works to create jobs for millions in vital areas such as education, health care, provisions for the elderly, culture and the rebuilding of the socio-economic infrastructure—in the first instance, in Eastern Europe. Every citizen must have the benefit of a state-guaranteed pension which provides for a comfortable and secure retirement, an extensive and publicly-financed system of health care, and free access to education up to and including university level.

The main argument against such a policy is the claim that public treasuries are depleted and there is no money. In fact, the wealth to carry out such measures exists in abundance. The problem is that it is concentrated in the hands of a privileged few.

An extensive program to meet social needs presupposes the rational organization of economy in the interests of society as a whole, rather than its subordination to the profit interests of big business and the banks. Major concerns and financial institutions must be brought under public ownership and made subject to social and democratic control. Small enterprises, which currently struggle to survive under the pressure of big business, must be assured access to cheap credit so that they can guarantee decent wages to their workers. A system of rigorous taxation

must be introduced for those at the highest income levels and for major share- and property-holders, in order to finance a program of social development. Recent proposals for a symbolic increase in the taxation of millionaires are totally inadequate for the realization of such a project.

For democracy and the rights of immigrants

The defense of democratic rights and the establishment of genuine political equality for all citizens is a central element of a socialist perspective. We categorically reject all restrictions on democratic rights imposed in the name of the “war against terrorism.”

The struggle for democratic rights and the fight for social rights are intimately connected. There can be no talk of any real democracy as long as social wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small minority, the work place is a de facto dictatorship of the bosses and workers are denied democratic control over decision-making, the press and media remain at the beck and call of big business, and education and culture are dominated by a small elite. Cuts in the spheres of culture, education and the arts, in particular, do enormous damage to the fabric of society. There is a profound connection between the glorification of militarism, brutality and egoism and the denigration of past artistic and cultural achievements.

Workers will be unable to defend their own democratic rights unless they assume responsibility for the millions of refugees and immigrants in Europe who exist under conditions of repression and deprivation. We are for the immediate repeal of Germany’s reactionary and discriminatory immigration laws and utterly oppose the criminalization and deportation of refugees. We defend unconditionally the right of people to live and work in the European country of their choice. Witch-hunts launched against immigrants and attempts to sow divisions on the basis of religion, color or country of origin are all designed to split the working class and keep the masses of society in check. Refugees and immigrants represent a significant section of the working class, and will play an important role in the struggles to come.

Against war and militarism

Working people must develop their own independent response to the dangers arising from the eruption of American imperialism. They must not allow themselves to be lulled into complacency by the attempts at conciliation with Washington by the German and other European governments. The aggressive militarism of US imperialism threatens to plunge humanity into a catastrophe. It is the greatest single danger threatening world peace.

We are in favor of the immediate dismantling of NATO and the closure of all American bases in Europe.

At the same time the European governments seek to conciliate with Washington, they pursue their own imperialist projects. This is what lies behind the reorganization of the German army and moves towards the development of a joint European strike forces and an independent European armaments industry. We oppose such developments and call for the immediate withdrawal of German and other European troops from the Balkans, Afghanistan and Africa, as well as from Iraq and the rest of the Middle East.

Support the election campaign of the SEP

We make no facile promises. The construction of a new workers party is an arduous task which requires farsightedness and perseverance. There is no miracle cure to the crisis of capitalism and the dangers which flow from it. Whoever promises a quick and easy solution is either a fool, a charlatan or a demagogue. But the task must be taken up. Those who claim that the re-election of the SPD and Green Party represents a “lesser evil” to the conservative union parties and the “free market” FDP, or boost hopes in Lafontaine and the PDS, are merely preparing the way for new defeats.

The social democratic policy of half-measures, maneuvers and concessions, its abhorrence of firm principles and promotion of opportunist myopia instead of bold vision and courageous action, have

had a suffocating influence on political thought. Now, the collapse of the SPD’s policy has cleansed the atmosphere and cleared the way for serious political debate. A settling of scores with the SPD requires the adoption of a fundamentally new political orientation—a conscious break with its political conceptions and a return to the revolutionary traditions of Marxism.

As the German section of the International Committee the Fourth International, the PSG bases itself on a unique historical tradition. The Fourth International is living proof that there exists a Marxist alternative to social democracy and Stalinism, the latter of which, whether in Moscow or East Berlin, fraudulently claimed to represent the continuity of Marxism.

The Fourth International was founded in 1938 by Leon Trotsky to defend the program of socialist internationalism against the degeneration of the Communist International. Its roots go back to the Left Opposition which, beginning in 1923, fought against the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union. Hundreds of thousands of opponents of Stalinism lost their lives in the blood purges of the 1930s—virtually all of them accused of supporting Trotskyism.

In numerous articles written in exile, Trotsky warned of the dangers resulting from the policies of Stalin and Communist Party leader Thälmann in Germany. He urged the German Communist Party and the SPD to form a united front against the Nazis. His warnings were in vain. As a result of the ultra-left and defeatist policies of the Stalinists, the SPD remained in control of considerable sections of the working class, and Hitler was able to take power. In 1940, Trotsky was murdered in Mexico by a Soviet secret agent.

The historical continuity of the Trotskyist movement is today embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International. Domination of the workers’ movement by social democracy and Stalinism made it possible to isolate the Marxist tradition. Now, however, the political bankruptcy of these bureaucracies opens a new historical period in which the Forth International finds a growing response. In the *World Socialist Web Site*, the ICFI possesses an instrument that is gaining a worldwide audience and increasingly coming to be recognized as the authentic voice of Marxism.

To ensure the success of its election campaign, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) requires broad support—to collect the necessary signatures, to distribute political material, and to organize a series of election meetings. We require as well generous donations to finance the campaign.

Above all, we encourage all those who see the need for a genuine socialist alternative to read and follow the work of the *World Socialist Web Site*, to make contact with the PSG, and to take part in the political discussion and activity required to build the PSG and the Fourth International.

To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>