

European workers rally against cuts in social welfare, war and racism

the Socialist Equality Party Germany (PSG)
13 September 2011

The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party, PSG) is concluding its election campaign in Berlin with a European workers' meeting on Saturday, September 17. The meeting begins at 15:30, at Tempodrom (Möckernstraße 10, 10963 Berlin).

Encouraged to attend are all those who want to fight against low wages, welfare cuts, unemployment, xenophobia and the danger of war, and are no longer willing to accept the dictates of the financial aristocracy over society.

The meeting will discuss a socialist answer to the capitalist crisis. In addition to PSG candidates, representatives of the Fourth International from other countries will speak.

The PSG does not beg for alms and reforms. It aims to build a new party, which will enable working people to intervene in political events. Capitalism is in its deepest crisis in eighty years. A disaster threatens mankind if decisions that affect the fate of billions of people are left to the managers in the executive suites of the banks and their political stooges.

In the 1930s, the economic crisis led to the Nazi dictatorship and the Second World War. These bitter experiences threaten to repeat themselves. The decline of world economy is accompanied by the dismantling of democratic rights, increasing xenophobia, growing national tensions, the collapse of the European Union and increasingly brutal imperialist wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

The current crisis is even more fundamental than eighty years ago. At that time, Europe was sliding towards the abyss, while the US had got a grip on the crisis with the help of the New Deal and was able to emerge from the Second World War as the dominant economic power. Today, the US is itself the focus of the crisis, and no country or alliance can assume its role as the anchor of the capitalist world economy.

Only a social revolution can prevent another disaster. As long as control over the billions in assets remains in private hands, and the speculators on the stock exchanges decide the fate of entire national economies, not a single social problem can be solved. Therefore the financial institutions and large corporations must be expropriated and put under democratic control. Economic life cannot be left to the anarchy of the markets and the profit interests of the capitalists.

The parties represented in parliament and the trade unions will never be willing to advocate such a perspective; a thousand threads link them with the ruling elite.

A socialist programme cannot be realized through applying pressure to the existing state institutions. It requires the independent mobilization of millions of workers around the world, the establishment of workers' governments and the establishment of the United Socialist States of Europe.

The economic crisis and its causes

The capitalist economy is out of control. Governments are being driven by events. One emergency summit chases the next, and yet government bond interest rates are shooting up. The panic on the stock exchanges

heralds a deep recession. The corporations will respond with new waves of layoffs, the governments with further budget cuts.

With references to the high public debt, one austerity measure follows the next. No one can live permanently beyond his means, it is said in justification. But the debts have not fallen from the sky. They are a consequence of permanent tax cuts for the rich and billion-dollar rescue packages for the banks. Now the banks have turned the tables. Three years ago, they could save themselves with public money; now they are demanding that the resulting budget gaps are covered with brutal austerity measures.

There is no lack of money, but it is to be found in the pockets of the rich. In Europe, more than three million millionaires hold assets of 7.5 trillion euros. A one-time special charge of 4.7 percent on this wealth would be sufficient to repay the whole of the Greek national debt in one fell swoop.

In Germany, the sum of private wealth in the past 15 months has grown by 350 billion euros, despite the financial crisis. This too is exactly as much as Greece would need to discharge all its debts.

The class divisions in society were never as deep as today. Annual salaries and bonuses in the tens of millions of dollars are not uncommon for those at the top. A corporate boss earns 300-500 times as much as a worker—forty years ago it was just 20 to 40 times as much. The richest 10 percent of the population now owns 60 percent of private assets.

On the other side of the equation stands a generation with no future prospects. In Spain, one in two young people aged 15 to 24 are unemployed, in Europe it is one in five. In Germany, the number of unemployed youth is lower, but only because most are working in precarious, badly paid jobs.

To bring this crisis and the looming depression under control requires the launching of massive programmes of public works running into billions of euros. Speculative profits, high incomes and wealth should be taxed accordingly or confiscated. But such measures are not even being discussed, let alone carried through.

In economics, the media and politics it is the financial aristocracy who call the shots. It is just as unwilling to give up its wealth and privileges voluntarily as was the French aristocracy on the eve of revolution in 1789.

Nothing illustrates this better than the recent events in England. The British government has responded to the social revolt by desperate young people with an iron fist. Around 3,000 people have been arrested for mainly petty offences, including an eleven-year old youth. Some have already been sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Social networks and mobile phones are being monitored by the Secret Service. The police have a total of 30,000 names on their wanted lists.

The defence of democratic rights

The events in England prove that social inequality cannot be reconciled with democracy. Across Europe, democratic rights are under attack. The powers of the state are being increased in order to monitor and control the

population. Strikes are banned, workers are sacked for petty infringements, and the judiciary is used to intimidate and suppress protests. In parliament, elected representatives merely rubber-stamp decisions about handing over billions to the banks.

At the same time, racist, anti-Muslim and other right-wing extremist groups are actively encouraged, to divert social outrage into reactionary channels and incite desperate elements against the working class.

In Hungary, Italy and the Netherlands, right-wing extremist organizations are involved in the government. In France, the National Front is being systematically built up. In Germany for weeks, Thilo Sarrazin was given a public platform to spread his racist views. The far-right German National Party (NPD) receives state aid worth millions for its election campaign; it is so strongly penetrated by the secret service that the Supreme Court even described it as a "state-run affair".

Those responsible for the growth of the right-wing are the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Left Party and the unions, who in the name of "left politics" attack the socially weak, treat refugees with brutal harshness, sabotage workers' struggles and abandon the social questions to the extreme right.

The Socialist Equality Party defends all basic democratic rights. We defend especially the democratic and social rights of immigrants and refugees. Every worker must have the right to live and work in the country of his or her choice, without restrictions.

The defence of democratic rights and opposition to the extreme right are inextricably linked to the struggle against the dictatorship of the banks. When workers begin to intervene massively in political events they will undermine the right wing.

The struggle against militarism and war

Sixty-five years after the end of the Second World War, Europe is once again being riven by rival nation-states. The ruling class argues about whether the insatiable appetite of the financial markets is best satisfied through issuing joint European bonds, or whether the euro should be abandoned and the European Union left to its fate.

The PSG rejects both. The first subordinates everything to the dictates of the most powerful financial institutions, demanding the introduction of murderous austerity measures, to which countries such as Greece, Ireland and Portugal must first submit, before it is extended to the rest of Europe. The second would blow apart Europe, plunging the continent into nationalist rivalry, conflicts and wars.

The dividing line in Europe is not between nations but between classes. Only a united struggle of all European workers can break the dominance of the financial aristocracy, which is defended by both the advocates of a strong EU as well as their nationalist opponents, and unite Europe on a progressive basis.

While the EU is drifting apart, the European great powers are returning to their old colonial objectives. The war against Libya is a naked war of conquest. Under the cynical guise of protecting the civilian population, the Western powers have bombed the country for six months, killing thousands of civilians and helping to power a regime that serves their interests more pliantly than the Gaddafi dictatorship. Now they are scrambling for control over Libyan oil and the billions that are frozen in the accounts of the Western banks.

Germany only abstained in this war for tactical reasons, because it does not want to endanger its relationships with Russia and China. Now it wants to be part of sharing out the spoils and also to participate in future wars. The Libya war is the prelude to a re-division of the entire Middle East, a region that was already the focus of imperialist intrigues in the last century. The next targets for the Western powers are Syria and Iran.

The so-called peace movement has collapsed completely. Many of its former representatives now support the Libya war explicitly. The Greens wanted to participate in it from the start. Their transition to the side of

imperialism is itself a result of the deep crisis of capitalism. The sharp class differences cannot be resolved by half-measures.

The struggle against war is inextricably linked to the struggle against its roots in the capitalist system. Only a socialist offensive of the working class can stop militarism.

The PSG calls for the immediate ending of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya and the withdrawal of all foreign troops, especially Germany's *bundeswehr*.

In Egypt and Tunisia, we advocate a second revolution, which would not only overthrow the leaders of the old regime but the regime itself and bring the working class to power. Arab, Jewish and other workers in the region must unite to overthrow monarchical and bourgeois rulers and expel the imperialist powers. Only the United Socialist States of the Near and Middle East can bring democracy, peace and progress to the region.

Building a new workers' party

The parties that once pretended to advocate social justice and the interests of the workers now prostrate themselves at the feet of financial markets. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in Berlin, where the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Left Party have governed together for the past 10 years.

The SPD-Left Party Senate has accumulated a devastating social record. Berlin's official unemployment rate, 13.5 percent, is the highest of all Germany's federal states. Nearly half a million people are dependent on the state's miserly Hartz IV unemployment benefits. Poorly paid jobs have massively increased. Social amenities have been destroyed, and libraries and schools left to decay or closed. The same is true for swimming pools and sporting, cultural and leisure facilities, as well as the Berlin S-Bahn (urban tram system).

The SPD-Left Party in the Berlin Senate poured billions into the debt-ridden Berlin Banking Society to protect the financial assets of the Berlin high-fliers. It supplemented this generosity to the rich with a long list of merciless attacks on the population. It cut the income of public servants by 12 percent, demolished every third municipal job, reduced grants for Berlin's universities, ended the right to free learning materials in schools, increased infants' daycare fees, and prolonged teachers' working hours. It slashed the staffing expenditure of the Berlin Transport Company and the universities, and sold almost every second municipal residence to financial sharks, thereby setting off a devastating increase in rents.

This austerity orgy was aided by the trade unions, whose officials were often card-carrying members of the SPD and the Left Party.

The SPD and the Left Party are closely connected with the ruling elite, sharing their wealth and privileges. Comparable parties all around the world practice similar politics. It is impossible for pressure from street protests to transform them or force them to adopt another brand of politics. Anyone who claims otherwise is only spreading illusions. Herein lies the role of groups like Socialist Alternative (SAV) and marx21. They work inside the Left Party, disguising their right-wing politics with left phrases.

The Socialist Equality Party absolutely condemns this political chicanery. Without breaking from the SPD, the Left Party and the trade union apparatus, not a single social achievement of the working class can be sustained, let alone the struggle for socialist policies.

We are building a new party based on the long heritage of revolutionary Marxism. The PSG is the German section of the Fourth International, founded in 1938 by Leon Trotsky to defend the programme of socialist internationalism against Stalinism. Its roots are in the Left Opposition, which from 1923 fought against the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union.

Our candidacy for the lower house of the city administration offers Berliners an alternative to the politics of the SPD and Left Party.

However, the importance and relevance of this campaign extends far beyond the German capital. If our candidates are elected, they will use their presence in the second chamber to mobilise the working class in Germany and internationally for a socialist programme.

The programme of the PSG

The prerequisite for a socialist transformation of society are the social struggles that are already underway. Our programme is based on the current needs of working people and defends their rights and achievements against the attacks of the ruling class, thus contributing to the development political awareness in the working class.

Our demands are not limited by what capitalism claims can or cannot be achieved. Our starting point is a realisation of the actual needs of modern mass society. We refuse to limit our demands to what narrow-minded opportunists say is “practicable in the here and now”. What it is possible to achieve in a given situation is determined by the political struggle. Those unwilling to fight will achieve nothing.

The PSG advances a programme of inalienable fundamental rights:

The right to work

The most fundamental right is the right to work. Without a permanent well paid job, it is impossible to satisfy other needs. Instead of consigning billions of euros to rescuing banks, we call for public works programmes with full and regular pay. There is much to be done. There is chronic shortage of staff in the medical, nursing and education sectors. Our schools and the city’s infrastructure are in a precarious condition.

Existing jobs must be defended as a matter of principle. This cannot be left to the trade unions and works councils, which are closely linked to management and ready to sabotage any serious struggle. We advocate the establishment of action committees, which will—without recourse to the unions—make contact with workers at other factories, occupy factories at risk of closure, and take steps to establish democratic control over production.

The right to a fair wage and an adequate income

Mounting poverty has disastrous consequences for both the younger generation and the elderly. We demand for everyone a basic monthly income of €1500, financed by tax increases for the rich and super rich, as well as a limit on top incomes. An income of €20,000 euros a month should be enough for anybody.

The right to housing

We demand the right to adequate housing and the affordable supply of electricity, gas and water!

The right to leisure

Workers have a right to adequate time with their family, as well as for leisure and cultural activities. This includes the right to holidays, as well as free childcare and free access to recreational and educational facilities for young people.

The right to education

In a society where access to education depends largely on income, any talk of equality of opportunity is humbug. Education should not be reduced to the immediate requirements of the market. It is an important grounding for democratic participation in social life. Therefore, the PSG calls for an end to cuts in social services and, instead, massive investment in daycare centres, schools, colleges and adult education, as well as museums, libraries and theatres. The accumulated knowledge of humanity must be freely available to all people via the Internet.

The right to a healthy and safe environment

Health and well-being depend on a healthy environment. However, it is impossible to prevent the destruction of the environment if all social decisions are dictated by the profit motive.

The nuclear disaster in Fukushima shows the devastating consequences of nuclear energy. Only through the expropriation of the energy companies is it possible to opt out of nuclear energy and switch to

alternative and renewable forms of energy.

Abolition of discriminatory immigration laws!

These rights apply to all people regardless of their origin or religious belief. We fight to defend the unrestricted democratic and social rights of refugees and immigrants. Every worker must have the right to live and work in the country of his choice, without any restrictions.

Build the Socialist Equality Party and the Fourth International!

The most important prerequisite for a socialist transformation of society is the building of the Socialist Equality Party into a mass party.

All those who agree with our goals should vote for the PSG on September 18, come to the European Workers’ Assembly, read the *World Socialist Web Site* regularly, study the “Historical Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party”, and join the PSG.

Time and place for the European Workers’ Assembly:

Saturday, September 17, 2011 15:30 Uhr

Tempodrom (Möckernstraße 10, 10963 Berlin)

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>