

German Socialist Equality Party to stand in European elections

Socialist Equality Party (Germany)
7 February 2004

The German Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG) decided at a meeting last month to put forward a national list of candidates for the June 11-13 elections to the European Parliament. In Germany the elections take place June 13.

The PSG has chosen as the party's leading candidate Ulrich Rippert (52) from Berlin, chairman of the PSG and a member of the editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*. Its other candidates are Helmut Arens (54), a chemical worker in Frankfurt-Main; Dietmar Gaisenkersting (37), a teacher in Duisburg; Elisabeth Zimmermann (47), an office worker in Duisburg; Celia Sokolowsky (30), a teacher of languages from Bielefeld; and Christoph Vandreyer (23), a psychology student in Berlin.

The PSG is utilising the European elections in order to encourage a broad discussion of a political programme that seeks to answer the pressing issues confronting millions—the threat of war, growing poverty, unemployment and social insecurity, as well as the erosion of democratic rights.

Although the PSG is standing candidates in Germany, its election campaign will embrace all of Europe. As the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the PSG collaborates closely with its fraternal organisation—the Socialist Equality Party in Britain. A central element of the election campaign of the PSG will be its close collaboration with the US Socialist Equality Party, which is standing its own candidates in this year's presidential election.

At the heart of the programme of the PSG is the international unity of the working class. It decisively rejects the European Union, its institutions and planned constitution, as well as EU plans for expansion into Eastern Europe. At the same time we reject all forms of nationalism and chauvinism. Insistence on national sovereignty and sealing off Eastern Europe and Turkey do

not offer an alternative to the course of the EU, but merely supplement it. Such policies split peoples along national, ethnic and religious lines and assist in their suppression. Against the Europe of the banks and big companies the PSG proposes a united socialist Europe.

Washington's effort to violently subordinate the entire world to its dominance threatens not only the countries of the so-called Third World, it once again raises the danger of armed conflict between the major powers. On February 15 last year, millions around the world took part in the biggest antiwar mobilisation in history, protesting the war in Iraq, which they regarded—quite correctly—as a direct threat to themselves.

Europe's governments, however, are incapable of confronting American imperialism. While a number of European governments—Britain, Italy, Spain and Poland—gave their unconditional support to Washington, the initial opposition to the war from Paris and Berlin was by no means serious. Neither government, for example, contemplated closing American bases on their territory—a measure that would have created serious obstacles to the preparation of the war. Since then, both countries have expressed their full support for the occupation of this oppressed country. This was spelled out explicitly in the recent formulation by French Defence Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie: “Nobody can have an interest in a US failure in Iraq. That would be a defeat for us all, for the entire world.”

The initial rejection of the Iraq war by the German and French governments was bound up exclusively with their own imperialist motives. Both look with fear and mistrust upon the unilateral drive by the US to control a region in which they themselves have considerable economic and strategic interests. Following their failure to stop the war, they are now pressing ahead with the militarization of Europe and are preparing their own interventions in Africa, Asia and other parts of the world. They are even

considering stationing troops in Iraq itself.

In order to combat war it is necessary to understand its roots. In the final analysis, the threat of war emerges from the profound crisis of capitalism on a world scale. The US government operates not from a position of strength, but of weakness. In order to overcome the internal contradictions confronting American capitalism it sees itself forced to undertake a bitter worldwide struggle for markets, profits and cheap labour. With the conquest of Iraq it aims, according to the presidential election platform of the SEP in the US: “to gain access to the second-largest oil reserves in the world; to place American military forces at the centre of the Middle East, thus gaining an unparalleled geo-strategic advantage over all potential rivals; and to provide an overseas diversion from the growth of social discontent at home.”

The PSG bases its struggle against imperialism and war on a socialist programme. It strives to mobilise the international working class, including American workers: i.e., all wage earners—manual and clerical workers and intellectuals—whose lives depend upon the sale of their labour power and whose living conditions are incompatible with a system which prioritises the realisation of profit.

The PSG stands for the energetic defence of democratic and social rights threatened by state rearmament programmes and the destruction of social gains. It fights for the reorganisation of economic life on the basis of socialist principles—placing the banks and major companies under social control, and the organisation of production according to social needs instead of the profit drive of a wealthy minority.

Social Democracy has always justified its defence of capitalism with the argument that the system could be organised in a socially responsible fashion and reformed to conform to the interests of workers. Today nothing remains of such conceptions. The German SPD and other Social Democratic parties throughout Europe have been thoroughly discredited. They are leading the assault on social gains and democratic rights, and are indistinguishable from their conservative opponents. The Labour Party of Tony Blair has taken over the programme of arch-conservative Margaret Thatcher; Gerhard Schröder’s “Agenda 2010” dwarfs the attacks carried out on the welfare state by his conservative predecessor Helmut Kohl.

The same applies to the Stalinist Communist Parties of Italy and France. In Germany, all talk of socialism by the Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS) is thrown to the

winds as soon as it takes over political responsibility. In Berlin the SPD-PDS coalition has assumed the leading role in Germany in attacks on social rights and the jobs and wages of public service workers.

The aim of the PSG is not to put pressure on these parties in order to “reform” them or win over “progressive” layers. Such a perspective is both impossible and reactionary. It would serve merely to provide a left cover for such organisations. The PSG aims to free workers from the influence of these parties and develop an independent political movement on the basis of an international socialist programme.

We base ourselves on the lessons of the twentieth century. As the German section of the Fourth International, we stand in the tradition of the Left Opposition founded by Leon Trotsky, which defended the socialist foundations of the Soviet Union against the Stalinist bureaucracy. The Fourth International has continually opposed the standpoint that it is possible to equate the despotic dictatorship of a bureaucratic caste with socialism. Socialism can only be built on the basis of the broadest democratic participation of the working population.

In the coming weeks the PSG will put forward its own election manifesto which will explain in more detail the perspective outlined above.

We call upon all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to actively support the election campaign of the PSG. The first stage of the campaign consists in gathering 4,000 valid signatures of support in order to qualify the party for the election. The second stage consists in the broadest distribution of our election manifesto, which will be translated into a number of different languages, as well as the organisation of meetings to discuss our program. Additional details of our campaign, election support forms and other election material will be posted on a special web site dedicated to our election campaign.



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