

# European elections: Socialist Equality Party of Germany receives nearly 26,000 votes

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The German Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG) recorded its best ever result in European elections held on June 13th. Its joint list of candidates for all 16 German states received a total of 25,824 votes.

Compared to the votes obtained by the PSG and its predecessor organisation in the European election of 1994 and German national elections in 1998, the PSG more than doubled its vote. In 1994, the forerunner of the PSG, the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (League of Socialist Workers—BSA), received 10,678 votes. In the 1998 national elections, in which the PSG ran candidates in six states, the party received 6,226 votes.

This increase in votes is of considerable political significance. It shows that a section of workers, intellectuals and youth are beginning to seriously take up political issues and support an international socialist perspective.

In its election campaign, the PSG made clear that the political task was not to put pressure on the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Green Party, or seek merely to win protest votes. The election manifesto of the PSG began with the words: “Our election campaign is aimed at laying the foundation for a new party that represents the interests of working people, including pensioners, the unemployed and young people.”

Providing the basis for such a party, the PSG presented a programme that differentiated itself clearly from that of social democracy. Its central points were the international unity of the working class, the reorganisation of the economy along socialist lines, and the development of a politically conscious revolutionary movement of broad layers of working people.

As the election manifesto stated: “Socialism is

incompatible with bureaucratic domination. Real social progress is possible only if the broad mass of the population is actively involved in the organisation of social relations and controls them democratically.” The statement went on to say, “Our election campaign is aimed at launching a broad discussion of these critical questions.”

The election result demonstrates that this appeal found a significant response.

The most politically significant and biggest source of increased votes for the PSG came from regions in the west of the country that have previously been the heartland of the SPD.

The largest number of votes for the PSG from a single German state—3,828—came from North-Rhine Westphalia. (This compares to 1,146 votes in the 1994 European election). However, in other states such as Baden-Württemberg (2,637) and Bavaria (1,853) in the south of the country, the PSG was able to more than double its previous totals. In many small and middle-sized towns the PSG received a significant portion of its total vote, i.e., Ravensburg (157) and Hannover (249).

In the states of the former East Germany the PSG also drew increased support. In Saxony-Anhalt the party won 2,339 votes. In the former industrial regions of Dessau and Halle the PSG vote rose to nearly 0.5 percent.

In the capital city of Berlin, which is governed by a coalition of the SPD and the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the PSG received a total of 1,404 votes. In 1994, the party obtained 635 votes in Berlin, and in the 1998 national election it won 298 votes. This growth in votes is unmistakably a response from voters seeking an alternative policy after a period of social cost-cutting by the city administration.

The PSG was able to win this support despite a virtual boycott of the party by the media. Apart from a number of radio and television election spots, the PSG campaign was exclusively based on the distribution of its election programme, thousands of which were disseminated. In addition, a series of articles and statements on important political developments in Europe, the US and across the globe appeared on the *World Socialist Web Site* and the PSG election web site, providing a vital political orientation for voters.

The programme of the PSG differed fundamentally from those of all other parties participating in the election. Apart from the established bourgeois parties with representation in the German parliament, the majority of other organisations that stood candidates were of the political right. They reacted to globalisation by demanding a tightening of national borders.

In opposition both to the bourgeois European Union and the nationalist opponents of the EU, the PSG put forward the perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe. From this standpoint, the party called for the defence of the rights of immigrants and refugees, and devoted a considerable section of its programme to this issue.

Besides the SPD, the only other nominally “left” parties taking part in the elections were the PDS and the DKP (German Communist Party). The two latter organisations have their roots in Stalinism. As the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the PSG is rooted in the traditions of the Trotskyist movement, which opposed Stalinism from the standpoint of internationalism and revolutionary Marxism.

The PDS emerged directly from the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the Stalinist ruling party of the former East Germany. Following the collapse of East Germany, the newly formed PDS adopted a programme based firmly on the defence of the bourgeois order. This party is currently part of governing coalitions in three German states, where it has supported drastic cuts in social welfare programs.

The DKP was a West German offshoot of the SED, and was dependent on its sister party’s financial and political support. In the post-war period, the DKP served as a loyal prop of the bourgeois order in West Germany. In the 1970s, the party offered its services to the trade union bureaucracy, carrying out thuggish

attacks on Trotskyists and other left-wing opponents. In the 1980s, the DKP sought to silence all those who questioned the policies of the official peace movement. After the collapse of East Germany, the DKP retained its Stalinist leanings while refusing to enter the ranks of the PDS.

With its latest election result, the PSG has neared the vote received by the DKP, which still possesses an apparatus and financial resources based on its continuing relations with the trade union bureaucracy. For example, in the state of Saxony the PSG won 3,472 votes, a larger total than that obtained by the DKP. In a number of working class areas, e.g., Bautzen, Meißen and Löbau-Zittau, the vote for the PSG was considerably higher than that for the DKP.

These numbers have a special significance. For decades, Stalinism was able to utilise large party apparatuses and enormous financial resources, underwritten by the Kremlin, to hold down the genuine representatives of revolutionary socialism. With the ignominious collapse of East Germany and the decline of the SPD, this period has ended.

In relation to the total size of the electorate, the vote for the PSG remains small. Nevertheless, this latest election result reflects an unmistakable political trend that is still in its early stages: a turn by tens of thousands of politically conscious people toward a socialist alternative.



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