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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, SGP)

26.09.2021

## *The international significance of Germany's federal election and the campaign of the Socialist Equality Party*

Germany's September 26 federal election takes place amid the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, which has vastly exacerbated the global class struggle and international tensions between the major powers.

The election campaign is dominated by the same issues that are coming to a head all over the world. While all capitalist parties, regardless of the election results, are preparing a government of militarism, mass infection and enormous social polarization, resistance is growing among workers. The Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, SGP) gives voice and a socialist perspective to this opposition.



Demonstration with SGP placards [Credit: WSWS]

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Germany has had only three chancellors in the last four decades: Helmut Kohl, Gerhard Schröder and Angela Merkel. Beneath the surface of this deeply ossified system, explosive contradictions have developed to which none of the established parties has an answer.

What characterizes the election is the deep gulf that separates all parties represented in the Bundestag (German parliament) from the mass of the population. Not one of them is able to address, let alone provide an answer to, the concerns and needs that are preoccupying millions of voters.

That was underscored during Thursday's final debate of all the leading candidates from the parties represented in parliament. In the 90-minute broadcast, not a single politician uttered a word about the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed over one million lives in Europe alone, including more than 93,000 in Germany. All parties support the policy of open workplaces and open schools, which sacrifices human lives every day to corporate profits.

They also barely touched on all the other burning social issues: growing poverty, precarious employment, dilapidated schools, understaffed hospitals, mass layoffs in industry, and ailing infrastructure. This is because all parties have committed themselves to squeezing the hundreds of billions of euros that they handed over to the banks and corporations during the pandemic, with virtually no strings attached, out of the working population.

Thirty years ago, German unity was celebrated as a triumph of democracy and freedom. But what has become of it? In the interests of the financial oligarchy, children are being infected, hundreds of thousands of jobs destroyed and the last remaining social rights smashed. For the vast majority of the population, it is impossible to influence politics by casting a ballot.

The election polls and their sharp fluctuations also reflect the deep alienation of official politics from the population. No party has achieved more than 25 percent support, and none is able to inspire voters or retain their loyalty. One-third of voters remain undecided, even on the eve of the election.

In Germany, the contradictions of world capitalism, which the ruling class tried to solve in the last century by means of war and fascism, are once again erupting in explosive fashion. Escalating trade wars and great power conflicts are undermining the German export industry. The attempt to dominate Europe with the help of the European Union is rekindling old enmities.

The established parties are responding by moving closer together and outdoing each other with great power fantasies and demands for military buildup, for which there is no popular support at all.

In his speech at the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Friday, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier announced that the next federal government would accelerate and escalate Germany's return to an aggressive foreign and great power policy.

"At this time of political transition in my country, I want to assure you: Germany will remain, even after this election, a country that is aware of and assumes its international responsibilities," the head of state said. Germany and Europe must "become stronger"—also in military terms. That's why Berlin is "investing more in its defense capabilities in these unstable times," continued Steinmeier.

The drive to war is supported by all parties in parliament. Christian Democrat chancellor candidate Armin Laschet, for example, promised more money for the German army during Thursday's debate. To live up to "Germany's status internationally," he demanded, it must be given armed drones and the "best technology" in every respect. Social Democrat chancellor candidate Olaf Scholz also declared his support for a massive increase in military spending and called for a "strong, sovereign Europe."

The Greens' Annalena Baerbock also appealed for "our own strategic sovereignty" and joined the call for rearmament and armed drones. Because Germany has been too "friendly and too silent," Europe has left a foreign policy void that Russia and China are now filling, the Green Party candidate complained.

Janine Wissler of the Left Party offered herself as a coalition partner to the SPD and the Greens, assuring them that her party's occasional criticism of NATO in no way meant that

she was in favor of its dissolution or even Germany's withdrawal from the world's largest military alliance.

Aggressive domestic and foreign policies in the interests of the financial oligarchy are accompanied by fierce attacks on democratic rights. Just as in the 1930s, the ruling class is reacting to the capitalist crisis with authoritarian and ultimately fascist forms of rule. Official policy increasingly takes the form of a conspiracy against the population.

Even when the Grand Coalition was voted out of office four years ago, the parties spent four months behind closed doors negotiating the continuation of the hated government constellation. In so doing, they made the fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD) the official opposition party in parliament, integrated the far right into the political system and systematically pursued its agenda.

Right-wing terrorist networks in the army, police and intelligence services were able to operate unhindered. Hans-Georg Maaßen, an AfD sympathizer, headed the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Germany's domestic intelligence agency. The Socialist Equality Party was placed on the intelligence service's watch list. Right-wing extremist professors, such as historian Jörg Baberowski, were promoted and protected by the political establishment and the media.

But the resistance to this shift to the right is enormous. The rejection of fascism and war is deeply rooted in the population after the crimes of German imperialism in the 20th century. This makes the plans of all parties to continue and intensify right-wing policies all the more explosive. As in 2017, it is already becoming clear that the maneuvering and intrigue to form a government will last for months.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) opposes this right-wing conspiracy and gives a voice and a socialist perspective to the opposition to the lurch to the right, the policy of mass infection and inequality.

In six election broadcasts and countless position statements and pamphlets, we—together with our comrades from the US, France, the UK, Turkey and other countries—took a stand on all major political issues and articulated a clear perspective.

At the heart of our election campaign has been opposition to the “profits before life” policy. Together with our sister parties in the Fourth International, we are fighting for a globally coordinated strategy to eradicate COVID-19. This includes comprehensive lockdowns and school closures until the pandemic is under control, a vast international vaccination program and compensation for workers for all lost earnings.

We are fighting for an international socialist response to the climate question. Only a global plan based on scientific knowledge can stop climate change. The economy must be reorganised to serve the needs of the people and the environment, not profit interests.

We are the only party uncompromisingly opposed to German militarism. We demand the immediate withdrawal of all troops from foreign countries and the dissolution of the German army. Instead of armaments and war, billions must be invested in health and education. And we oppose the right-wing extremists. The fascist brown swamp must be drained, and the secret services must be disbanded.

We have initiated action committees for safe workplaces at important companies and created a network of action committees for safe education in schools. In all these initiatives we have worked closely with our international comrades to link them globally.

Class struggles are developing around the world. The WISAG airport workers, who resisted wage theft and layoffs, the Berlin nurses and train drivers who have gone on strike against low wages and unbearable work stress, and the strikers at IKEA and in the construction industry are part of this international movement.

To be successful, these struggles must become the starting point of an international offensive against the capitalist system. This is the only way to prevent a renewed relapse into barbarism.

The struggle for this socialist perspective does not end on September 26. We are fighting for every vote because a strong result for the SGP is an important sign of growing opposition to mass infection, inequality and war. But the crucial task is to prepare workers for the class struggles ahead and to build the SGP and the Fourth International as the new socialist leadership in the working class.

World Socialist 25.09.2021