

Growing child poverty in Germany

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After weeks and months of delays, the German government has finally produced the *Tenth Report on Children and Youth* it commissioned. There was a reason for their procrastination. The report confirms what is becoming increasingly obvious: poverty is growing in Germany, especially amongst children.

The report runs to 342 pages in describing the situation of 12.3 million children in Germany at the end of 1995. At this time, 7 percent of children and youth (860,000) lived in families receiving welfare payments.

More recent figures reveal a rising tendency. In 1997, around 1 million children came from families dependent on welfare. In some areas the average numbers were even higher. Over 14 percent of children in the city of Essen in the Ruhr live in families who rely on welfare. This means that one in four Ruhr children live in poverty, i.e., in a family with less than half the average earnings, generally accepted by social scientists as the definition of poverty.

The report identifies considerable poverty 'in sections of the population,' and states that 'child poverty is a grave problem.' According to the definition above, in 1995 there were 21.9 percent of children below 16 years of age in former East Germany who could be classed as 'poor children', and 11.8 percent in the west of the country.

Social scientists single out the lack of suitable accommodation for particular criticism. This increasingly means that families with medium incomes find it harder to pay the high rents demanded by landlords. They also show the growth of poverty is a result of past government policy. It is 'a social scandal that families' financial room for manoeuvre has been decreased in the 1980s and 90s by the reforms of the income and tax systems, instead of being extended.'

According to the report, the growth of poverty and unemployment means that more children are not just financially worse off, but their health and social

relationships also suffer. The number of homeless children forced to live on the streets is increasing. Two-thirds of all children have been struck by their parents, 150,000 have been physically abused and 80,000 sexually abused.

However, all these facts were brushed aside by Families' Minister Claudia Nolte, even though the report is substantiated by many reports from teachers that poverty means children have no money for school meals let alone class outings. Nolte's presentation of the report was like watching someone walk on hot coals. After introducing the report she immediately denied it.

'Childhood in Germany is a good childhood,' the 32-year-old minister said. Not only did she question the definition of poverty generally agreed to in scientific circles, she also said equating the receipt of welfare with poverty was 'not acceptable'. In response Lothar Krappmann, an educational researcher and one of the report's authors, said Nolte was obviously confusing poverty with starvation.

The actions of Minister Nolte displayed a behaviour which is typical for most politicians in the present elections. As they have no answer to the real social problems, they simply deny them.

See Also:

Socialist Equality Party begins election campaign in Germany

[3 September 1998]

First Socialist Equality Party election broadcasts

[3 September 1998]

Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) Election Programme 1998:

For an independent political movement of the working class

[28 August 1998]



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