Germany: Magdeburg demonstrators denounce Hartz IV cuts

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On August 9, a reporting team from the World Socialist Web Site *spoke with participants at the demonstration against the Hartz IV measures in Magdeburg.*

Jürgen B, an unemployed electrician: "The Hartz reform is imbalanced and incomplete and I cannot agree with it. I am now 62 years old and was practically driven into retirement, although I have to wait until I am 65 years old before I can draw a pension.

"Now I will be thrown together with those dependent on social welfare payments who have never worked. I have total of 46 years of work behind me. For 20 of those years I worked a three-shift system. I was always at the grass roots. It is scary what they are doing here."

WSWS: "How do you regard the events of 1989 today?"

JB: "At that time, I took part in the Monday demonstrations, and today I am also taking part, although you cannot exactly compare the political events. But the people at that time let off steam. Since then, much has improved, but the situation has worsened regarding jobs. One could have not predicted at that time that so much would be allowed to go to the dogs, and it will probably get worse."

WSWS: "Would another party or the PDS change anything?"

JB: "If Lafontaine set up a party, I would support it at once. I do not have much time for the PDS. I would be prepared to support a new left-wing party, whether it was led by Lafontaine, Attac or anybody else, but we have had enough bad experiences with the PDS, and its predecessor, the SED."

WSWS: "What would you expect from a party led by Lafontaine? Economic conditions would not change with such a party."

JB: "I would expect such changes from a Lafontaine party, or from any party that proceeds in a more socially just manner. I cannot understand how West German officials can receive extra incentive payments to come to the East and implement the new laws, while those receiving Hartz IV payments have to make do and clothe themselves with 331 euros. That's just not on. It is just so socially unfair.

"I would introduce a wealth tax forcing the rich to pay taxes here, even if they live abroad. In addition, I want tax dodgers and politicians, who are just as corrupt, to be treated in the same way as the recipients of the new unemployment payments. They should be stripped naked and have to reveal what they have in their accounts, like us. Then it would be fairer. That has perhaps little to do with left-wing thinking, but more with my sense of justice."

WSWS: "Why do you think Oskar Lafontaine resigned from his position as economics minister after the SPD took power?"

JB: "Because of political conflicts. Schröder is at least as right-wing as the CDU. He has nothing more to do with the SPD than they do. And the handful of lefts still in the party who are fighting for social justice are being suppressed. They are just not listened to. When a left like Nahles says anything, they all thoroughly agitated."

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Monika Troitsch, an unemployed clerical worker: "Here there is a fundamental violation against human rights. There are capable people who have trained and acquired further qualifications and now confront ruin. I am a single parent with two children who are studying. As a single parent, I do not know how I can provide for my children next year."

WSWS: "You are also affected personally?"

MT: Yes, since my separation from my husband in

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1989 I have remained unemployed. You can no longer get a job, because the old connections are at work and still control everything. People who had nothing to do with the old system cannot even enter the job market. This has been our experience since 1989. We don't know what we should do anymore. We are powerless. At that time, we demonstrated so things would improve, but today it is still the same people in power."

WSWS: "How do you regard the events of 1989 today?"

MT: "For us democrats, nothing has been achieved. Those people are in power who formerly glorified the dictatorship, while those who were active everywhere and fought for a better future have been left high and dry because the old cronies occupy all the posts. We have appealed to all possible authorities—even to Frau Merkel (the leader of the conservative Christian Democratic Union [CDU] and a citizen of former East Germany). We received a thoroughly disgraceful answer from her. She says she knows what is going on, but can do nothing about it. In the region of Schwerin it is the same story."

WSWS: "You do not expect anything from the PDS?"

MT: "No, I no longer have hopes in any of the parties. Things have just gone downhill because of (CDU) Chancellor Kohl, who had promised something different. Everything has been destroyed—even factories that were very good and competed with western concerns. The workers are now all unemployed because there is nothing left. Our children studied in the West, they want nothing more to do with this country. They have made a complete break."

WSWS: "What was your previous job?"

MT: "I was employed in administration. I received a ban from carrying out my profession. Now I have attempted to get myself rehabilitated, but no one is prepared to listen. I can no longer get a hearing because the people who ruled in the past are in the top jobs today. My former boss is now well established and will not let me work again. What is taking place here is ghastly. No people in the west of Germany know what is going on. Nobody takes up these issues. The entire history is being neglected."

WSWS: "How do you think things will develop?"

MT: "I hope the people will finally be listened to. Hartz IV must not be allowed to happen because it will hit very many single households. We do not know how we should insure for the future. We can no longer take it. You must accept any job that pays two euros per hour. I have worked everywhere—for example, in an old people's home—just to be able to get out of the house, in order to be able to breathe properly. At home, I just deteriorate and slowly become depressive. But we just can't get work because we have a cross inserted in our files. We have made appeals to the West, but nobody helps. We feel completely isolated. I will not vote for a party in the future. We need real intellectuals in power who have mastered economic and social policy and not just the lawyers we have at the moment, who do not have a clue about anything."

WSWS: "Have you given thought to the fact that people in every country confront the same situation?"

MT: "We know that. What has to be done can be achieved only through the power of people everywhere. People have to stand up, otherwise nothing will happen. That is why we have taken to the streets today. It seems to many that they will not really be hit, but it will affect everyone next year. Wage agreements are being destroyed. Job protection is being done away with. Various measures will take effect."

WSWS: "The situation is not very different in the west of the country"

MT: "The authorities there work more efficiently. They really do things for you—above all, for the qualified."

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Sebastian Jannack, a secondary school student: "I don't think the demonstrations will achieve anything. I have absolutely no time for the Schröder government. There is no other party that would change anything. I cannot see a solution for the problems. In any case, Hartz IV has to go."

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Dietmar Fröhlich, a 49-year-old restorer: "The entire society has to be reorganised so that there is sufficient work for all. None of the existing parties are prepared to do this."

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