

Germany: Thousands demonstrate on eve of G-20 summit

Left Party leader booed in Frankfurt

Our reporters
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Just days before the G-20 summit in London, tens of thousands took to the streets of the German capital Berlin and its main finance centre Frankfurt-Main on Saturday to protest the policies of the German government and political establishment.

The two demonstrations, held under the slogan "We will not pay for your crisis!" were organised by a network of groups including the Attac anti-globalisation movement, various trade unions, social and radical left political groups. An estimated 20,000 took part in the Frankfurt demonstration and at least 15,000 participated in Berlin. The organisers of both protests acknowledged they were surprised at the high turnout.

The demonstrations and rallies in Berlin and Frankfurt were characterised by a high level of militancy, with many banners and posters declaiming the huge sums paid out by the German government to the banks while workers were expected to shoulder the burden.

The finance crisis is already hitting the "real economy" of Germany hard, and on both demonstrations there were delegations of workers who had either lost their jobs in the last weeks or were threatened with imminent unemployment.

On both demonstrations the main political speakers were leading members of the Left Party—Gregor Gysi in Berlin and Oscar Lafontaine in Frankfurt. In Berlin, Gysi spoke to a small crowd of around 500 at the end of the demonstration. Many of the protesters had not

bothered to stay to hear him while many others were still making their way through the streets of Berlin as he spoke.

In Frankfurt, some participants on the demonstration booed Lafontaine as he attempted to speak at the end of the rally. Our photo shows Lafontaine being sheltered by the umbrella of a trade union official after a number of anarchist demonstrators from anti-fascist organisations lobbed eggs at the Left Party chairman.

In their remarks, both Gysi and Lafontaine attacked the policies of the German government and called for radical-sounding measures to deal with the crisis. Lafontaine referred to the Mafiosi of bankers who were profiting from the German government. But both Gysi and Lafontaine spoke on behalf of a party that is rapidly watering down its program in the expectation that it could play a role in a future German government.

A recent report in *Der Spiegel* magazine describes how the Left Party is "trying to edge its way towards the political centre" and establish a "Left Party Lite" that is "more attractive to the middle classes." To this end, the Left Party is revising its position on a number of fundamental issues—in particular with regard to the nationalisation of banks and finance companies.

In his speech given to the Bundestag on March 20, Gregor Gysi supported the re-privatisation of the largely state nationalised Hypo Real Estate under the condition that the HRE repay the billions already invested in the company by the government. Oscar Lafontaine was one of the first leading politicians to support the German government's bailout plan for the

banks.

WSWS reporters spoke with a number of participants on the Berlin protest. Miriam, 39, said,

"I have come along today because, like the rest of those here, I am not prepared to pay the costs of this crisis. I think it is particularly bad that the sphere of culture is being hit with savings being made everywhere—for example in the sphere of theatre. I was laid off in connection with cuts made at the Komische Oper here in Berlin and must now work freelance.

"Wages are declining and the rich are becoming ever richer. One solution to the crisis has to be more nationalisation. When it comes to the Left Party, I must say I was already very annoyed with the position they took towards the Israel invasion in Gaza. One of the party's leading members, Klaus Lederer, even went so far as to speak at a pro-Israel demo in Berlin, but did not appear at the Palestinian demonstration a week earlier. That is simply wrong!"

Stefanie, 19, told our reporters, "I have come along because I find it completely unacceptable that the government hands out our money for the managers who already have millions at their disposal. As far as I am concerned, there can be no solution within the capitalist system, which is oriented purely to the creation of profit and is characterised by speculation.

"The Left Party is once again trying to reform capitalism. As far as I am concerned, the party has no right to attend the demonstration. They should not be here. They are sitting in the Bundestag and are also responsible for what is happening. It will never be possible to achieve socialism through reforms."

A total of 15,000 took part in the demonstration in Frankfurt. Participants had travelled from many towns and cities in southern Germany, including Rüsselsheim, Mannheim, Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, Aschaffenburg, Saarbrücken, Gießen, the Ruhr area (Dortmund) and from the East German state of Thüringia.

Participants carried posters declaring "Billions for the bankers, millions for the managers—poverty and unemployment for us!" and a number of delegations from workplaces under threat attended the demonstration.

Melanie Schneider from Wetzlar said that like many other factories her workplace had implemented short-time working. Melanie works for Buderus-Edelstahl and reported that all temporary employed workers had already been dismissed. Now workers with regular contracts feared that their contracts would not be extended.

"It has all happened so incredibly fast," Melanie reported. "In Wetzlar workers have taken to the streets in protests during the past weeks. The situation is intolerable. The state is donating money to the bosses to secure their bonuses and workers are expected to finance the whole operation with their taxes."

Ingmar Pons, a bookbinder from Darmstadt, hoped that the mobilisation would be just the start of a much broader movement. "There are even more people ready to protest. In France over 2 million people took part in a general strike. I am angry that the banks are given all the money they want but nobody is called to account for what has happened. In the final analysis millions will pay the price and be forced to suffer—while at the same time the same small minority are able to profit."

Sven Schmalz comes from Eisenberg in Thuringia: "It is about time people took to the streets and not simply put up with everything. What is taking place here is undoubtedly class politics. As for the Left Party, they have been saying for years that it is necessary to exert pressure, but up to now they have not done much. The capitalist system is simply bankrupt. It is not a question of a system with an error. The system is the error."



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