

Dresden protest hits Saxony state government cuts

Our correspondents
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A demonstration of 10,000 was held last week in the German city of Dresden under the slogan: “We are worth more, those who impose cuts today will pay for them tomorrow”.

The demonstration was in opposition to the €1.7 billion in budget cuts planned for 2011/2012 by the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP) state government in Saxony. These cuts represent 10 percent of the Saxony state budget. Schools, colleges, and spending on youth and social services, as well as on arts and culture, will be especially hard hit.

The demonstration was called by a broad coalition of trade unions, including the teachers union and the police union, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens, the Left Party and their youth organisations. The demonstration comprised three marches through Dresden city centre. Posters bearing the inscription, “Whoever imposes cuts, will be overthrown”, and a homemade guillotine with the demand “Make the right cuts”, showed the anger of the demonstrators.

But this outrage is not enough to prevent the cuts as long as such demonstrations remain in the hands of the Social Democrats, the Left Party, the Greens and the unions. This was clearly shown by the rally outside the Saxony state legislature at the end of the demonstration.

Deputies from all the parties were allowed to speak. To begin, representatives of the CDU and FDP tried to defend the massive cuts, garnering a loud chorus of boos and whistles. Then it was the turn of representatives from the SPD, Greens and the Left Party to speak in an attempt to pose as parties of social equilibrium. Thus, the SPD-Left Party-Green “opposition” was offered a platform to pose as a social alternative to the CDU-FDP coalition in Dresden.

Despite many polemical phrases, the representatives of all parties made clear that they were not opposed to cuts in principle. They merely wanted them to be implemented

more “cogently”, in order not to exacerbate the anger of the people.

Dulig Martin, chair of the SPD parliamentary group in Saxony’s state assembly, said this was “not an austerity package, but a steamroller. Social and welfare structures are being destroyed that have developed over years and provide important services”.

Michael Moschke, spokesman for the conference of Saxony student bodies, also warned “there is enormous ferment in the rank and file. We see the foundations of social cohesion in danger”.

The chair of the Left Party in the Saxony legislature, André Hahn, also expressed concern about social cohesion, and called on the CDU/FDP state government to “reconsider its cuts orgy”. At the same time, Hahn made it clear that the Left Party was just as willing to enforce cuts: “For example, in our initiatives for more investment in education we have always tried to make proposals for savings elsewhere”.

Due to their close links with the trade unions, the SPD, Greens and Left Party are better suited than the CDU and FDP to implement the cuts and control resistance against them. The evidence of this was already provided by the SPD-Green federal government under Gerhard Schröder (1998-2005) with its Agenda 2010 labour and welfare “reforms”, when it pushed through drastic austerity measures against massive popular protest.

In Saxony, the grand coalition of the SPD and CDU under Prime Minister George Milbrandt (CDU) spent billions to rescue the Sachsen LB (state bank) and plundered the budget. The Left Party has long made clear at a state level that it represents no progressive alternative. Wherever the party is called upon it is ready to implement privatisations, reduce wages and cut jobs, and, as in Berlin, devastate education.

Many participants on the demonstration were aware of the role played by the SPD, Greens and Left Party in the

cuts.

Christopher, a 22-year-old student, saw a connection between the world economic crisis, the bank rescue packages and the recently agreed austerity measures, which will push the entire burden of the crisis onto the weakest members of society. Even when it was in the grand coalition government with the CDU, the SPD helped prepare the billion-euro rescue packages. And the Left Party, by agreeing to the expedited parliamentary proceedings, made possible both the “rescue” of the banks and the euro. Therefore, he did not hold out much hope in the alliance that had called the demonstration in Dresden.

Klara, a 25-year-old student teacher, also had no confidence in the alliance that had organised the demonstration, since it was not clear how it would implement the demands being raised. She was particularly angry over cuts in education. After a discussion with WSWs reporters, she agreed that the question of a free and fair education system could not be considered in isolation from other social developments, and ultimately was a class question.

Representatives of the WSWs distributed the statement, “How can education be defended?” which states, “The Linke.SDS (Left Party Student Organisation), the Jusos (Young Socialists), the Green Youth and the parties to which they are aligned are responsible for the misery in education and do not belong on the demonstrations. They are imposing the social cuts and stand on the side of the banks, management and the speculators. Students can only fend off the attacks if they break once and for all with these political hypocrites and view themselves as part of the international working class”.

Moreover, the statement explains, “An education system that is oriented to the needs of people and the personal development of every individual can only be established if it is freed from the market and controlled democratically. A comprehensive and free education system is thus closely linked with the struggle for the socialist transformation of society”.



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