

Germany: SEP rally calls for defence of British youth

Our correspondents
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As part of its election campaign in Berlin, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party, PSG) recently held a rally in solidarity with the British youth. PSG election campaigners had distributed more than 10,000 leaflets in the days beforehand. The campaign in defence of British youth met with broad support.

The rally began shortly after noon with a song by rapper Kidd Key from Neukölln. By this time, many participants had already gathered at Hermannplatz. As the rally got underway, passers-by became interested and listened to the speeches, also engaging in discussions at the PSG literature stall.

The first speaker at the rally, Christopher Vandreier, a candidate for the PSG in the Berlin city legislature elections, explained why the PSG was holding a meeting in Neukölln in defence of British youth.

“The youth revolt in the UK is the result of glaring social inequality, which also exists in Berlin,” he said. “Masses of young people are being deprived of any future and condemned to a life of poverty. Officially in Britain, 20 per cent of 16-18 year-olds are unemployed and the wages of those who have jobs are in the range of two to five pounds an hour.”

The reaction of British politics has revealed “how the ruling elite deals with the effects of social devastation: they defend social inequality with police violence,” said Vandreier. The British police have instigated mass arrests and raids.

Vandreier warned that the ruling elite in Germany would also react to signs of social unrest with police-state measures: “We should make no mistake, everyone will be faced with these measures.”

The unrest in Britain is a result of the deep class division of society, he explained. “Young people are described as criminals and looters; but the real criminals and looters are sitting in the corporate boardrooms and in parliament. While young people are starting to feel the full force of the repressive measures, these people go unpunished. They are not brought to justice for their criminal activities.”

The PSG demands the release of all young people who were arrested for petty offences, and calls for the criminal prosecution of the politicians, bankers and speculators responsible for the crisis.

After this speech, Kidd Key again took to the stage, entertaining those at the rally with hip-hop beats and lyrics about the social reality faced by young people in Neukölln. Kidd Key is active rapping and producing music in the local youth club “Outreach”, which is directly threatened by the cuts of the Neukölln district council.

Some of the young people from “Outreach” came to the rally, among them Önder, who is 19 and is currently training in IT systems. Asked about the unrest in Britain, he said, “It is right that they are putting up a fight. There is far too little solidarity with them in Europe.”

In his opinion, such revolts were also possible in Berlin, where poverty among young people is also increasing. Önder experiences this almost daily at the youth centre. “Whenever I want to do something with my friends, we get told by two or three people that it’s not possible because there’s no money.”

Asked about the policies of the Berlin Senate (city government) Önder remarked, “I find it disgusting that politicians and the media provide a platform for Sarrazin. It shows what they stand for.”

For years, the former Social Democratic Party (SPD) finance senator (minister) Thilo Sarrazin was responsible for pushing through drastic cuts in social and youth provisions. Last year he published a book—*Germany Abolishes Itself*—that was a racist diatribe against Turkish and Arab families. Accompanied by TV reporters, he recently visited Kreuzberg and Neukölln, provoking the Turkish and Arab communities in these boroughs.

In her speech, Susanne Salamah, also a PSG candidate, drew a parallel between the social situation in Britain and in Berlin, where “in its ten-year rule, the SPD-Left Party Senate is unequalled in the level of social cutbacks it has introduced.”

Immediately after coming into office, the city government was revealed as a representative of Berlin’s financial elite and an enemy of workers and youth. With the so-called banking protection law, the crisis-ridden Berlin Bankgesellschaft was bailed out to the tune of €21.6 billion; the Senate then pushed through massive cuts that have led to poverty and social misery in many parts of Berlin.

Salamah gave an overview of the brutal austerity measures introduced by the Senate. Berlin was the first of the German states to leave the public sector collective agreement covering federal and state governments, she said. “Since then, workers have faced significant wage cuts. Since 1998, some 46,000 jobs have been cut and the Senate has restricted the rights of employee representatives.”

In other areas too, the Left Party and SPD have acted consistently against the interests of the general population. “Publicly owned enterprises have been massively privatized. Some 150,000 social housing units were sold off to financial sharks, resulting in a shortage of accommodation, rising rents and an erosion of tenants’ rights.” Further cuts have been made in the education and science budgets. The result has been a “deterioration in learning conditions, overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, dilapidated schools,

overburdened students, a decrease in the quality of education, the abolition of free teaching materials and fee increases at day-care centres.”

The final speaker at the rally, Ulrich Rippert, PSG lead candidate in Berlin, spoke about the party’s programme. “The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit is participating in the election to the Berlin House of Representatives because it is necessary to prepare for major political clashes,” he said.

“All the official parties submit to the dictatorship of the banks. We do not! We fight for the expropriation of the banks as a precondition for a democratic organization of the economy. We demand that those in the boardrooms of the banks responsible for the financial and economic crisis be brought before the courts and held accountable for their criminal acts. Without breaking the dictatorship of the banks, no single social problem can be solved.”

Rippert then drew a parallel to the 1930s, when the ruling class responded to the world economic crisis at that time with fascism and war. Even now, “the ruling financial elite is determined to shift the burden of the crisis with all brutality onto the general population. With massive cuts in social spending, a narrow elite in business and politics is ruining society as a whole and is simultaneously stoking up racist and nationalist sentiments to divert social conflicts in a right-wing direction.

“In Tunisia, Egypt, Greece, Israel and Britain, social inequality is driving people onto the street”, Rippert continued, stressing, “a revolutionary storm is also brewing here”. The task of the PSG is to “prepare for such a development and steer it in a progressive direction, since a mass rebellion is inevitable and necessary. Only the intervention of hundreds of thousands into political developments can curb autocratic power and stop the criminal activities of the financial elite.”

To be successful, workers and young people need “a socialist programme, an international strategy and a revolutionary party. Only then can the working class conquer political power and build a society based on the needs of people and not the greed of a criminal elite.”

As the German section of the Fourth International, the PSG rests on the heritage of revolutionary Marxism and its defence against Stalinism and social democracy, Rippert said at the conclusion of his contribution. Only on this historical basis, was it possible to “raise workers’ political consciousness and to build on the revolutionary traditions of the past.”

His final appeal to support and become active in the PSG election campaign met with a warm response. Many workers and young people, both German and foreign-born, signed up to help the campaign and to talk about their own social situation and opinions.

Ali, a 43-year-old Palestinian from Lebanon, is being threatened with deportation after living in Germany for 32 years. “For some time, I have not been able to find work. That is why the authorities tell me I’m just being tolerated as an asylum seeker. I didn’t even know what they meant by asylum—I came to Germany as a child, I talk with a Berlin accent; what would I do in Lebanon? That’s not home for me.”

Ali had been following the rally and thought it was good that someone was finally showing solidarity with the desperate plight of the youth in England. He said he understood the situation of the youth, especially their hatred of an unjust system. Even as a little boy, Ali experienced massive injustice in Lebanon.

At just six years old, he lost his mother in the Lebanese civil war in the mid seventies. She was shot on the way to the well as she went to fetch water for her family.

In 1979, aged 11, he fled to Germany with his father and his four siblings. He attended school in Neukölln, and was sent to a children’s home when his father married again and started a new family. He studied at secondary school but has never managed to get a stable job. He went from one job creation measure to the next, and finally slipped through the net.

“My life is ruined,” Ali said bitterly. “My father should have taken us to another country. I’m not stupid, I like to read, perhaps something could have become of me. Now I only have hatred for the injustices in the world.”

Ali supports workers fighting together internationally, including in the Middle East. He is angry and sad that despite the many riches in the world, so many people are starving. He is particularly pleased that now Israeli workers and youth are taking to the streets against social deprivation. He has only contempt for the bourgeois politicians here, in Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian territories.

“I can understand how the young people feel in England,” said Jenny, 22. She came to Berlin from the Saarland along with two friends, and is desperately looking for an affordable apartment. Jenny is still unable to imagine that there could be such riots in Germany. “In comparison, young people in Germany currently have more opportunities,” she says. “But everything is getting worse here. This is like a balloon that will soon burst.”

Jenny has completed her studies in acting and has even found a job. But she will only be paid if the play runs. To survive during the long months of preparation, she has had to register for welfare support with the employment office.

“Things aren’t much better for my brother. Although he is permanently employed, he pays so much in taxes and charges that almost nothing is left of his salary”, she said. “The middle class is increasingly fragmenting. Those who have money become ever richer and the lower middle class is sliding into poverty. In any case, the British youth have given a signal”, continued Jenny, “but I’m torn. I understand the protests, but they are not very political, and offer no solution.”



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