

PSG campaigns in Berlin to stand in federal elections

Our correspondents
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The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG-Socialist Equality Party) is currently collecting signatures at job centres, factories and in working class communities to put its candidates on the ballot for the federal elections in September. The party is standing regional slates in Hesse, North Rhein-Westphalia and Berlin, and needs the signatures of 2,000 voters in each region.

The PSG is fighting for an international socialist programme, focusing on mobilising the working class against the social counter-revolution in Europe, imperialist war and attacks on democratic rights. Its campaign has been met with considerable interest and support.

The discussions held with PSG supporters indicate a growing concern about the social crisis and danger of war, and a general disgust with the establishment parties and trade unions.

Outside a job centre, Christina, 40, gave an indication of the situation in the health sector after years of spending cutbacks and job losses. “You don’t need to tell me about the social counter-revolution. I have lived through it all. I was a caregiver in a hospital in Berlin. To begin with, there were six nurses on the ward. In the end there were only two. We struggled like mad and had to process the patients like they were on a conveyor belt. Under such conditions there is absolutely no attention paid to hygiene in the hospitals any more.

“I feel I have been deceived by the whole political system and I haven’t voted for years,” continued Christina. “It is always just about money, people don’t count. Nobody asked the people on the street before the euro was introduced. It is as if those at the top have lost all connection with reality.”

She referred to the French revolution of 1789 and said, “The people must stand up, like they did then. Of course it is not enough to criticise, there must be

fundamental change. I have always been searching for something like your party.”

Many workers in Berlin are particularly angered by the rapid increases in rents. Under the Social Democrat-Left Party “red-red” state government, numerous apartments were privatised and assistance for rent systematically cut. The Social Democrat-Christian Democratic Union (CDU) state government, in power since 2011, has continued this course. Countless families have had to deal with unexpected double digit rent increases.

Christina told us how a housing corporation forced her and her husband out of their apartment even though they had regularly paid their rent. “We could prove it all, the job centre (which takes over rent payments for those on Hartz IV welfare benefits) presented all the documents. The company was nonetheless given the go-ahead to move us out because they have the money and power. They want to throw out poor people in order to build luxury apartments. I had to fight for months in the courts to get a new apartment.”

At the moment, she is living with her husband in emergency accommodation in Berlin.

Torsten, who signed the PSG ballot access form, reported that in the past year he had sought the services of three lawyers to fight rent increases. The rent for the other apartments in the building in Neukölln where he lives increased by 19 per cent every time someone new moves in.

“People earn at most €1,000 per month, and the rent for a one or two bedroom apartment is currently €500 or even €600,” said Torsten. “People are starving as a result of these rents. I don’t know how people on Hartz IV manage it. I got Hartz IV for a year—it was impossible. After paying bills, there was around €200 to live on.”

Many workers and young people also spoke about the dangers of imperialist war. Most of them condemned Germany's participation in wars in the Middle East, and showed their concern about the international expansion of these conflicts.

Thomas, who is currently looking for an apprenticeship, commented, "I certainly see the danger of a third world war. It seems like everything is pointing in that direction. The only question is what can be done to oppose it?"

Another worker remarked, "The world seems to have gone totally out of joint."

Many workers are angered by the role the Left Party and the unions have played in implementing deeply unpopular social cuts. Workers have closely followed the involvement of the IG Metall union in the shutting down of the Opel auto plant in Bochum.

A worker receiving Hartz IV welfare payments said, "It's true, the trade unions are not workers' organisations. It is disgraceful what they are doing."

Another worker added that most of the works councils stood on the side of management. "In my old job, I complained to the works council about a dispute with my boss. They passed the information on, and because of that I was laid off."

A former supporter of the PDS, the predecessor to the Left Party stated, "The Left Party is no different than the other parties. Socialist politics are nowhere to be seen with them."

Many workers from other European countries expressed interest in the PSG campaign and its fight to unify the working class throughout the continent. Workers from Poland referred to how a social counter-revolution had taken place in Eastern Europe after the breakup of the Soviet Union. This has since been expanded internationally.

An older worker from Poland supported the PSG campaign with the comment, "You are correct on all points. We must fight."

Barbara K, also from Poland, said she supported the perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe fought for by the PSG. In the 1970s and 1980s, she had known nothing of the struggle of Trotsky and the Left Opposition against Stalinism, she said, and discussed the history of the international Trotskyist movement with great interest.



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