

German election: Socialist Equality Party campaigns in Bochum

Our correspondent
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The preparation for war against Syria was the dominant issue which passers-by discussed with the Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, PSG) at an election information stand in the city centre of Bochum last Saturday.

As part of its campaign for the federal elections, the PSG has intervened regularly in the city, which is located in the Ruhr region of Germany. In recent weeks, high unemployment, spreading poverty and social cuts were the main themes of almost every discussion.

In the Ruhr area, every fifth person is at risk of poverty and in cities such as Dortmund and Duisburg the rate is even higher, at every fourth inhabitant. The statistical recording of poverty means that someone living alone must have less than €869 per month to live on. For a family with two children under 14, the poverty limit is a family income of €1826 per month.

More than 30,000 people are officially registered as unemployed in Bochum, and 90 percent of those have been registered for more than one year. 60,000 of the roughly 370,000 inhabitants receive Hartz IV benefits.

The planned closure of Opel's plant in Bochum in 2014 will drive up the unemployment and poverty levels. Not only are almost 3,300 Opel workers affected by this, but also several thousand workers in the supply industry.

These issues concerned many of those who spoke with PSG candidates and supporters. In Bochum there is hardly anyone who is not connected in one way or another with Opel, where at one time over 20,000 workers made their living. Many gave vent to their anger at the official parties and trade unions.

Last Saturday the preparation for war against Syria was at the centre of the discussions.

A young man came to the information stand and

stated, "It is good I met you here. Yesterday I searched with some friends on the Wahl-O-Mat (an internet programme) for a party I could vote for. I liked your answers best." He took the election statement and a lot of leaflets with him and promised to study them carefully. He was deeply concerned about the threatened military strike on Syria.

Margret, a teacher, spoke out against the war. "The arguments are the same as before the Iraq war, however the opposition to it has grown, even though it is hardly visible," she said.

She remembered her experiences with the subject of war from her youth at her parents' home. "War and the Nazis were taboo, just like in many other families. Many things in society have yet to be worked through, and wars are as before a great danger."

Margret said that she speaks regularly with her pupils about war and peace. "Every one of them is opposed to war and I am speechless when I see some of them again after two years and the young people are suddenly wearing a uniform. Then I wonder, what has happened there?"

Margret agreed with the analysis that militarism is also being strengthened in Germany. She agreed with the prediction that the preparations in the Middle East would lead to wider wars in which the United States would confront Russia and China. When an election assistant for the PSG spoke about the social background to militarism, Detroit came immediately to mind. "The situation in America worries me, above all in Detroit. A whole city is being abandoned," she commented.

Two young women, Belinda and Julia, stopped at the PSG's information stand to talk with parliamentary candidate Elisabeth Zimmermann about the coming war against Syria.

They spoke out sharply against the war. Belinda said, “I’m angered most of all by the warmongering in the media. I read the last issue of *Der Spiegel* and I became literally ill at how the victims of the poison gas attack were being used to promote war. I wouldn’t have expected that from *Der Spiegel*, but only from the *Bild* newspaper (a right-wing tabloid daily).”

Belinda and Julia firmly believed that the victims of the Syrian war should not be used to justify a military intervention by the US and its allies, which would bring far more suffering to the population across the region.

A pensioner looked at the picture on the leaflet of Wehrmacht soldiers marching and stated, “That gang of scoundrels sent me to war when I was young. I thought I was fighting for Germany, but I quickly realised that this was not the case. And now another war is being prepared. It must finally stop.”

A passer-by said that she had heard in the news that the German government would not be taking part in the war after all. “I think that would be good, I would be happy about that.”

Elisabeth Zimmermann replied to her by explaining that the German government had decided some time ago to support the US government in an attack on Syria. Both the government and the opposition had declared earlier in the week that they backed the American action. Both Chancellor Angela Merkel and foreign minister Guido Westerwelle said that the supposed poison gas attack by the Syrian government could not be allowed to go unpunished. Green politician Daniel Cohn-Bendit appealed for military action.

The woman then wanted to know what solution the PSG was suggesting for the people in Syria. Zimmermann stated that only a unified international struggle of the working class against the capitalist system could eliminate the cause of war and repression. In Syria and the whole Middle East, including Israel, the workers had to unite across all ethnic and religious barriers, bring down the current rulers and fight for the United Socialist States of the Middle East. Workers in Europe and America had to oppose all governments and parties that seek to impose their economic and geostrategic interests through war, and support the workers in the Middle East, she continued.

The woman agreed. She took the PSG’s statement “Hands off Syria!” and the PSG’s election statement

for the federal elections. She intends to participate in the PSG’s election meeting in Bochum on September 8, “80 years after the German catastrophe: against war and dictatorship.”



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