

# Osram workers in Berlin support PSG election campaign

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The PSG's election statement "Fight against war" met with great interest from workers at the Osram plant in Berlin. PSG candidates Ulrich Rippert and Helmut Arens distributed the statement during a shift change on May 15. Almost every worker took a statement and many stopped for discussion.

There is great concern among Osram workers about the constant intensification of war propaganda and the military build-up by the German government. An older worker on the early shift, who stopped his bicycle immediately, reflected this when he said, "We don't want war."

He added, "It could be a nuclear war. That would be the end of humanity. To be honest, I am for Putin. My opinion is: the United States has brought one small country after the other around Russia under its control, and now it is also Ukraine. In the process they have forced the Russian government into a corner."

A Bosnian worker on the late shift said that developments in Ukraine were really concerning her. "It reminds me of my homeland." There, politicians and NATO also initiated a civil war, which caused great suffering on all sides. Today many workers long for a return to the old Yugoslavia, including in Croatia and Slovenia. "Yes, Bosnia was communist, and there were problems. But my husband and I always worked, and we built a small house for our retirement. In the war it was demolished. Many of our neighbors and relatives were killed. Our dream of retiring in our homeland is ruined."

Some Osram workers expressed dissatisfaction with the co-optation of the media and its anti-Russian reports. One called out as he went by, "We know all about that from the GDR!" (the former Stalinist East Germany) Others were also interested in the PSG's standpoint on the issue of the European Union's (EU)

austerity programs, for example in Greece, and the role of the trade unions.

The lighting producer Osram, the second largest globally after Phillips, was separated from the Siemens concern in July 2013 and floated on the stock market as an independent company. The company still has 36 factories globally with around 35,000 employees, including two plants in Ukraine as well as plants in Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic and several in China. Since 2011, the company's management in Munich has been implementing a restructuring program, which is to eliminate 9,000 jobs by 2015. Seven plants have already been closed down or sold. In Germany, one in ten out of a total of 10,000 jobs are to be lost, of which 500 alone will be at the Berlin Spandau plant.

The Berlin Osram factory, with a history going back over a century, still employs 1,400 workers after the lay-off of 400. More is to come. Most were forced out through voluntary severance agreements, but there have also been some compulsory redundancies.

The trade unions and works council has signed off on the job cuts. Along with the works council representative for the Berlin plant Thomas Wetzel, the central works council chairman Willi Sattler sits on Osram's board of management, as well as works councilor from the Eichstätt plant Hubert Roßkopf, IG Metall spokesman for Bavaria Michael Knuth and IG Metall executive board member Irene Schulz. In the 2013 financial year, they received between €40,000 and €100,000 per person in fees for board activities, not including payments of €1,000 each for every board meeting.

Osram is consolidating its position on the stock market with the attacks on the workforce. The share price has already increased, and the company's board

has held out the prospect to investors of further increases during the 2013-14 business year. Despite shrinking sales markets for traditional lamps, the company achieved a surplus in the first quarter of 2014 of €69 million, according to financial daily *Handelsblatt*. This has had no impact on the plans for further job cuts. In Berlin, the company is investing €10 million in its plant for car lights, without withdrawing a single planned layoff. Instead, the remaining workforce was called upon to work overtime on holidays.



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