

Berlin elections: Workers and students speak out against war

Our reporters
28 April 2016

The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG) is currently collecting more than 2,000 signatures to enable it to take part in the Berlin state elections and the district elections in Tempelhof-Schöneberg and Mitte this September. At the center of the PSG's campaign is the building of an international anti-war movement.

The PSG held a rally on Saturday in the Schöneberg district of Berlin.

“Seventy years after the end of the Hitler dictatorship, the German elite are once again staking their claim as a world power and hegemon of Europe,” said Ulrich Rippert, chairman of the PSG and its leading candidate, in Kaiser Wilhelm square. The square is home to a memorial bearing the names of concentration camps and serving as a reminder of the horrors of the Second World War and the Holocaust.

While austerity measures are enforced in every category of social services, German defense minister Ursula von der Leyen has called for additional military spending in the amount of €130 billion, he explained. “We accuse the German government and all the parties that determine its policy at a federal and state level of systematically rearming the military and risking a Third World War.”

Joining Rippert were other speakers who made clear that the return to militarism and war was being caused by the deep crisis of capitalism. The ruling elites were reacting to the growing social polarization of society and the political crisis as they did in the 1930s: they plan and carry out wars, foment nationalism and, fearful of social uprisings, strengthen the oppressive state apparatus.

“We appeal to all those who are not willing to stand by and accept the threat of war,” explained Rippert. “The fight against war must be led by the international working class and based on a revolutionary socialist

perspective.”

Numerous passers-by in the lively shopping quarter stopped to listen, supported the intervention of the PSG in the elections with their signatures and took copies of the pamphlet “Socialism and the Fight against War,” as well as leaflets announcing the international May Day rally to be held online May 1.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with workers and students at the rally about the threat of war and growing social inequality.

The current developments toward war are terrible, said graphic designer Corinna N. One has to see Germany's policies in a global context. “Germany gets enormous revenues from arms exports. If it supports military operations abroad, it can push its weapons exports even more.”

Especially tragic is the situation of the refugees, said Corinna. “One of the worst terms created in recent years is ‘economic refugee.’ A distinction is made between war refugees and economic refugees. Europe sponged off the African countries and made sure the people there would have to flee. And then it told them: No, we can't take in any refugees. That is indescribable cynicism.”

If you're talking about closing borders, said Corinna, one should have closed the borders on the African side years ago—before the European “locusts” came to Africa. “For me, colonialism never stopped. First they pulled the rug out from under the people and then said let them all die.” That made her furious.

The agitation against refugees in the media and in politics was, in her opinion, above all a means of diverting attention away from abuses in Germany. “The way the media has reported on the influx of refugees has made people completely hysterical and encouraged hatred.” In reality, Germany is rich enough to take in

refugees and improve the social situation.

The right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has now gained influence as a result of official policy, said Corinna. For years the ruling parties “emphasized that the danger from the left was just as great as that from the right. For years the brutal activities of right-wing parties like the NPD were covered up. Now we are suffering the consequences. I have never understood why they did nothing for so long. Sometimes I think the major parties wanted it.”

Twenty-two-year-old Gamze, an international business administration student at Viadrina University in Frankfurt (Oder), pointed to the increase in military spending. “Instead of weapons, the money should be invested in education or other social areas,” she said. “Building up the military will only further promote war.” The real reason for the wars was oil, she continued. “It’s all about money. Every country just wants to assert its power.”

Gamze criticized the pact between the European Union and Turkey which provides for the deportation back to Turkey of those who have fled to Greece. Whether the money that Turkey receives will really be used for the good of the refugees is doubtful, Gamze said.

The most recent refugee tragedy in the Mediterranean had appalled her. One has to let refugees into the country legally, she stressed, “so that they don’t become dependent on smugglers.”

Gamze was skeptical of the established parties. “The major parties, for example the SPD [Social Democratic Party], all say they want to support refugees and stand for peace, but despite this they go in the direction of war. One doesn’t know what to believe. They say one thing and do another.”

Two young men from Egypt voiced their anger over the wars that have been waged in the Middle East for decades. Mohamed, 26 years old, works as an engineer in Berlin. “I consider the German policy of military buildup to be hypocritical,” he said, “because the government is supporting through its actions what they have rejected in words. The delivery of weapons to Saudi Arabia and countries in the Middle East is just one example. Germany is taking part in the US wars and the politics of violence, just like every European country.”

If one is opposed to the terror of the Islamic State

(IS), one must first recognize the roots of the problem. “The IS would not even have gotten so strong if no weapons had been sent there,” said Mohamed. For the western countries, this is not about a fight against IS, “it’s about oil.”

Mohamed and his friend Anwar, also 26, who studies in Aachen, follow the developments in Egypt with concern. “Unfortunately, the revolution has not accomplished the goals we had hoped for. Meanwhile, the army has taken on more and more control,” Anwar explained.

Under the dictatorship of Al-Sisi, the weapons were being used against his own population, said Anwar, who also reported that his friends had been arrested for no reason. One Egyptian friend who helped children on the street was arrested at a police checkpoint because she was only able to show an American passport. For that, she now has to sit for three years in prison. “That is one of a thousand stories not told here,” he said.

German policy was also purely hypocritical when it came to Egypt, said Mohamed. “Right after [President Mohamed] Mursi was removed from office, Germany criticised the putsch. And now the German government is shaking hands with the dictator.”

The government treats the refugees with the same hypocrisy. They claim too many refugees come to Germany. That’s why Syria’s neighboring Arab countries have to take in a lot more people. The refugees are “victims of the system,” said Mohamed. “They suffer the consequences of the American and European wars.” It affects those the worst who don’t have enough money to pay for help to escape and must hold out in those devastated regions.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact