

PSG election campaign: Anger at the government's new civil defence guidelines

Our correspondents
31 August 2016

The German government's new Civil Defence Guidelines have caused outrage in the Berlin state assembly elections. Candidates and supporters of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG, Socialist Equality Party) have met many Berliners outside Employment Offices, factories and in public squares who have expressed their shock and anger at the obvious war preparations.

On August 24, the federal government adopted its so-called "Guidelines for Civil Defence." They recommend people prepare for the worst by stockpiling food, water and other necessities. The guidelines do not preclude a war on German soil.

Some see the guidelines as a sick joke, but most Berliners are worried. The PSG election manifesto, which places the struggle against war at its heart, is arousing growing interest.

"I experienced the Second World War as an eight-year-old, and trembled in the cellar as the bombs fell," an 80-year-old pensioner said, who met the PSG campaign team on Heinrich Dathe Square. "The government announcement made me shudder. Haven't we had enough wars in Germany? We should all join together to prevent a new war."

Following his comments, a discussion quickly developed at the PSG campaign stall. Ursula, another pensioner, said, "As soon as I heard, I thought, have we come this far again? They're really thinking about war again?" Her second thought, she continued, was, "How should all these people do what they [the government] say? For example, I only have a small two-room apartment and no balcony."

Katherina, a middle-aged woman, objected, "On the radio, they justified it by citing the defence against terrorist attacks." Ursula responded, "But war is terror. How many people no longer feel safe if they live in a

city in eastern Ukraine, where the bombs are falling? Or in Syria or Iraq. Isn't that terrorism?"

Simone, a young woman, said she was absolutely against war. She said she had very little money; the Employment Office had sent her for a security job. She had not heard of the Fourth International before, but was interested in what she could do to prevent a war.

Frank works as a salesman. He listened to the discussion and then chipped in, "Now they want to set up a European Army, with its own tanks and weapons. They'll spend billions on it, but don't have any money for young people."

The discussion then turned to which parties were responsible. Frank said, "I voted for the PDS a few times, and later for [its successor] the Left Party. But when they were in power—what did they do? They were only interested in looking after their own jobs and wellbeing. What has the Left Party done in the Bundestag [federal parliament]? They've achieved nothing; they'll never get rid of the Christian Democrats like that. To do that, you'd have to vote for the AfD [far-right Alternative for Germany]."

"For God's sake!" Katherina said. "I'd rather vote for anything else than the AfD—they're out and out Nazis." She defended the Left Party, but then had to admit that they "only make promises." When the Left Party was in the Senate [Berlin state legislature] alongside the Social Democratic Party (SPD) from 2001 to 2011, "social rights were very curtailed," she said. She added apologetically, the Left Party had had to follow its coalition partner, the SPD, and concluded, "The Left Party is only any good when it's in the opposition."

Ursula, the pensioner, commented: "When they were in office, the speeches of [Left Party leaders] Löttsch and Gysi appealed to me, but the Left Party did nothing

more than all the others. The worst thing were the rent hikes.”

“The experiences with the Left Party show that there is nothing progressive about it,” PSG candidate Peter Hartmann said. “It is an amalgamation of old Stalinist bureaucrats from the former East Germany and trade union bureaucrats from West Germany. In government as in opposition, its aim is to suppress the working class and push through extreme right-wing policies. No other federal state in Germany imposed such vicious social cuts as in Berlin under the Left Party and SPD.”

Hartmann explained that the right-wing politics of the Left Party demonstrate that it is only possible to fight against social cuts and war on the basis of an international and socialist programme. He continued: “Those who don’t believe this should look at Greece, where the Left Party’s co-thinkers are in government and are imposing the European Union’s brutal austerity measures, while the massive expenditure on the army remains untouched. Such right-wing politics only strengthen the far right, such as the AfD.”

On another occasion, a young history student met the campaign team and said that she had liked the PSG election posters at the Free University. She said she was particularly struck by the slogan, “Solidarity with refugees—for a common struggle against capitalism and war.” This really captured the vital connection between the defence of refugees and the question of war and capitalism.

In a discussion outside the Charité hospital in Berlin Mitte, nurses and carers on their lunch break spoke with PSG candidates about the social attacks and danger of war. With nearly 14,000 employees, the Charité is the second largest employer in Berlin, after the Deutsche Bahn railway company. A year ago, workers at the Charité took strike action in defence of their working conditions, above all the need for more staff. In June this year, a new contract came into force that was hailed by the ver.di trade union and the Left Party, and especially the pseudo-lefts like the SAV, as “historic.”

Asked what improvements the last strike had brought, Charité workers could barely conceal their cynicism when they said, “The great strike brought something. There should be more staff, but we don’t know where from, and we haven’t seen them.” They had nothing good to say about the contract. “There won’t be any more staff,” a nurse said. “There’s no more money.

But those that do work there have to work twice as hard.”

Asked about the civil defence guidelines, one nurse said, “There are very many parallels to the 1920s, the Great Depression, and I find that frightening. I want to enjoy my life, but when I heard that the USA is bombing Assad’s troops [in Syria], a shiver ran down my spine. Such events could be a trigger for the spreading of the war.”

He was particularly concerned about NATO being mobilised against Russia. The ensuing lively discussion about how to oppose this threat of war took nearly the entire lunch break.



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