

“I think it’s the capitalists who are doing this”

Workers in Leipzig speak against the growth of the far-right

Our reporters
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For the last two weeks, members of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality have been speaking with workers and young people throughout Leipzig about today’s public meeting, “Lessons of the 1930s and the fight against the extreme right.” The speakers will be WSWs Editorial Board Chairman David North and the SGP assistant national chairperson Christoph Vandreier, the author of *Why are They Back?* The book, published by Merhing Verlag, was presented today at the Leipzig Book Fair.

Christopher Khamis, one of the SGP’s eleven candidates for the European elections, and a student at the University of Leipzig, said, “We have put up around 3,000 posters and handed out 120,000 leaflets around the city, including at this week’s Leipzig Book Fair. We have been talking with students and workers and intellectuals at the university about how, since 2014, there has been an intensive turn towards militarism by the German ruling class, and that this is what is behind the promotion of fascist forces and attempts to justify the crimes of the Nazis at German universities.”

“The initial reaction among people is often of shock,” he said, and “people ask us how this is possible, especially in Germany. There is great opposition and many people have supported the fight we are carrying out.”

“It is terrifying that such things can be said today without the authorities and the established parties standing up and saying something against it,” a student at the HTWK university in southern Leipzig told Khamis after hearing the statements of Humboldt University professor Jorg Baberowski relativizing the

crimes of the Nazis. “I’m seriously asking myself why.”

Pascal, 30, spoke to SGP campaigners in western Leipzig. He has worked as an aged care nurse for the past eight years. He said he is extremely concerned about the growth of the far right in Germany. “I have read about it in school and I see more and more it is like in the past,” he said. “There are parallels and maybe the danger is [that] we don’t see them. I think it’s the capitalists, the people up top, who are doing this. They want us to fight each other. For the people below it is easy to think that we are too far below and have no power against it. But I don’t think that is true. We are the majority.”

Pascal said the conditions in his work had greatly deteriorated since he began. “All the employees are frustrated about the pressure,” he said. “We get too little money and too much work. We are scheduled for 18 days without a break. It’s horrific for the patients and the employees. I get about 15 Euros per hour. Over 8 years it has gotten worse and worse. When I started we had no temporary workers. Now it’s the norm. These people we are caring for have worked their whole lives and they should have earned respect, but they get none. It makes me sad when I go there.”

Yesterday, Khamis and IYSSE members went to an Amazon distribution center and spoke with workers about why the working class is confronted with the fight against fascism, militarism and war. Against the promotion of nationalism by the ruling class, the campaigners raised the need for the working to unify its struggles internationally against giant global corporations like Amazon. The campaign team was met with a warm response by workers who spoke against

the growth of nationalism in Europe.

Outside the Leipzig Book Fair, an SGP campaign team spoke with Alina a 24-year-old nurse, and her boyfriend Tim, who came to the book fair from northern Germany. “I’m extremely disappointed that this is coming through again,” Alina said. “We have people still who were there under fascism. In school we are taught what happened. It’s a big theme in school.”

When asked what she thought about the official parties, Alina said that “sometimes I have the feeling it’s not important which party you vote for. They’re all the same. It’s not right or left, it’s just about them getting the money.” She added that the political establishment seeks to promote anger in the working class against immigrants as a diversion.

“Racism is being promoted everywhere,” she said. “Look in America. The American people are not originally from there. I think it is so stupid that Trump talks about how ‘we are the ones living here and born here,’ to say that everyone else who is coming is invading.”

“Here they are telling people that the people from Turkey or Syria are taking our jobs,” she said. “I don’t think that’s right. I don’t believe it. In Europe actually, in Spain, in Italy, in Germany, the people here are not really originally from there; they are from all over. But some people might believe it. And I think when they are having problems with their jobs and losing them that some might believe it.”

Alina spoke at length about the conditions in her hospital. She works in a rural area in northern Germany. The “stress is immense,” she said, and “all that is holding us together is teamwork. Sometimes we have bad days where you have two nurses with 40 people. In my department these patients are helpless. You have to wash them and help them turn so they don’t get wounds. Some are incontinent. With two nurses and 40 patients it’s not possible. The higher-ups are not interested. We’re going under actually.”

“Nursing is not what it was,” she said. “It’s all about money. Get as many operations as you can and get people out—that’s the point now actually, because that’s more money it brings to them. I’m extremely disappointed where medicine is about a human being. Here you have capitalism growing through and through everywhere.”

SGP campaigners spoke with Alina and her boyfriend

about the need for the working class to have a socialist perspective to unite internationally on common class interests and provide a means to fight against inequality, unemployment and war. They explained that a fight by the working class was needed. Alina said that in her workplace it was not the managers who organize the hospital, but the health workers, and that they can only maintain it despite the mismanagement of the directors through teamwork. Both Alina and Tim also raised questions about whether socialism could be realizable in practice and expressed interest in attending the SGP meeting.

Mark, 21, is working as a waiter in Leipzig. His family moved to Germany from the Czech Republic when he was four. He told SGP campaigners outside Leipzig university he was angered by the growth of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), which he said was only able to win support because of the right-wing policies of the major parties.

“I think people only vote for the AfD because all the other parties lie,” he said. “They try to show the other big parties that they’re not the only ones who will stay, and they can’t just keep lying to stay in power. It is like Trump in the United States. Even if what he proposed was bad, he was proposing a change. And nothing changes at the moment. Nothing works anymore. We protest and nothing happens. We work so much and get less and less. Then they say maybe you get one euro more per hour and it takes so long before you get it that it doesn’t help.”

Mark described the conditions for young workers in the hospitality industry, which makes up an increasingly large portion of the jobs available for youth. “I’ve been working as a waiter for two years,” he said. “I get 13 euros per hour, and others get nine. You couldn’t live without tips. I pay half of my wages per month in taxes. But when I retire, I will only get 300 euros a month back. How can an old man or old woman live on that money? Before the German people had to work until they were 65 and now it is 68. Who can work as a waiter to that point?”



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