

# 20,000 protest against unaffordable rents in Berlin

Our reporters  
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Twenty thousand participants took part in a demonstration in Berlin on Saturday afternoon under the slogan: “Housing for all! Together against high rents and displacement.” It began with an opening rally at Alexanderplatz, led from there to the Brandenburg Gate and on towards the Victory Column, where the closing rally took place.

The protest was organized by the Action Alliance against Displacement and Rent Madness. In addition to a large number of tenant groups, representatives of social and welfare organizations and trade unions also took part. Delegations also came from other cities—including Hamburg in the north and Ludwigshafen in the south of the country. Prominently represented was the group Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen & Co., which has initiated a referendum in Berlin for the expropriation of large real estate corporations. It will take place on September 26 at the same time as the Bundestag (federal parliament) and Berlin state legislature elections.

The Action Alliance is calling for a change of course in rent and housing policy that will make rents affordable again. This is to be achieved by measures such as the expropriation of large real estate concerns, a nationwide rent cap, halting the conversion of publically/communally owned dwellings into private property, and stopping landlords from serving eviction notices on the grounds they need a property themselves and the like.

Also on Saturday afternoon, a “dance demo” took place in Berlin entitled “Who owns the city? Together against social division,” which moved from Friedrichshain via Leipziger Street and Potsdamer Platz to Tempelhof.

The question of rents is one of the most pressing social issues in the capital, but also in other major

cities. Rents have been rising dramatically for years. While real estate speculators are making a killing, it is almost impossible for families to find affordable housing. It is not unusual for tenants to have to spend more than half their household income on rent payments.

For this reason, recent years have seen the growth of demonstrations and protests against high rents and the companies who profit from them. When the Supreme Court overturned the so-called Berlin rent cap in April, 10,000 people protested against it. A few days earlier, 10,000 had taken to the streets in a rent demonstration .

Now, demonstrators again gave vent to their anger about the untenable conditions. The WSWs spoke with Volker, who has lived in Berlin for more than 25 years. When he moved to the capital from western Germany, he had been able to move into a “nice little apartment close to work” despite a relatively low income. Five years ago, he had to move, and now spends more than twice as much on monthly rent. “If rents keep going up like this, I’ll end up on the street at some point,” is his fear.

“I will definitely vote yes in the referendum,” Volker says. However, he is very critical of the fact that the real estate sharks will be compensated for any expropriation. “Every cent they get is one too many.”

Supporters of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), which is running its own candidates in the elections to the Berlin legislature and the Bundestag, distributed a statement, “The expropriation of rent sharks requires a socialist perspective.” It was met with great interest.

The SGP calls for a Yes vote in the referendum on the socialization of the housing holdings of large real estate corporations. It warns, however, that real expropriation can only be achieved by fighting the Social Democratic-

Left Party-Green Senate (Berlin state executive) on the basis of a socialist program.

The Senate has already stated that it considers the referendum result “legally non-binding” and will ignore a positive result. The SPD and the Left Party, which together with the Greens form the Senate, have played the leading role in the last twenty years in selling off hundreds of thousands of public apartments to real estate corporations at giveaway prices and in cutting the capital’s infrastructure, clinics and public services to the bone.

However, this did not prevent the Left Party and the Greens from hypocritically pandering to the demonstration. Klaus Lederer, the lead candidate of the Left Party for the Berlin House of Representatives election, walked along, as did Green candidate for the Bundestag, Canan Bayram.

The SPD’s top candidate, Franziska Giffey, on the other hand, reacted almost hysterically in opposition to the demonstrators’ demands. But it is with her as governing mayor, however, that both the Left Party and the Greens want to form the next Senate.

The German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB), whose head Reiner Hoffmann has been inciting the most vicious attacks against train drivers who are fighting for better wages and working conditions, was also represented at the demonstration by its board member Stefan Körzell.

The SGP’s statement reads: “The SGP is pursuing a completely different strategy than the initiators of the referendum. We do not rely on the establishment parties and trade unions, but on the independent movement of the working class, which is developing energetically worldwide. ...

“The aim of the SGP is to give a socialist orientation to the opposition and the struggles of the working class, to unite them internationally and—together with its sister parties in the Fourth International—to build a mass socialist party.”



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