

Exploding food and energy prices in Germany: “It’s a disaster”

Our reporters
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Petrol, heating, electricity and food—prices in Germany are rising at breakneck speed in the face of the Ukraine war. While this hardly matters for the rich and upper middle classes who set the tone in politics and the media, for the overwhelming share of the population it threatens their existence.

WSWS reporters spoke about the current situation to workers, pensioners, unemployed and single parents in the Ruhr city of Duisburg in front of a Lidl supermarket. Last year, the consumer price index in the Ruhr area had already risen by 5.2 percent. On the other hand, wages, and especially welfare benefits, hardly increased at all. Welfare recipients, who must spend most of their income on food, have received €449 a month since January—only 0.7 percent or €3 more than before. Currently, this is about the price of a litre of sunflower oil at the discount supermarkets.

“It’s a disaster,” says Nezir, originally from Kosovo. He receives a minimal pension and can now only afford what is on special offer, even at the discounters. “Everything else is too expensive.” He runs from one discount supermarket to the next to do his shopping. “I have to look for offers all the time, as the prices go up every week.”

Georgina is a single parent. “Everything is getting more expensive; I really have to scrimp on money now. If you look now, a litre of cooking oil costs €4.99 instead of 79 cents, that’s quite a difference. People don’t drive anywhere anymore because they simply can’t afford it.” Those who suffer most are the children, she says. “Everything falls away, going swimming, going to the forest for a walk, etc. If you have to spend all your money on food, then that means missing out on leisure activities.”

Georgina is against spending huge amounts of money on war. “We should not be involved in war in the first

place. That we are paying for it now is obviously the easiest way for the government. The Germans let themselves be bullied for far too long before they start making a fuss.”

She also disagrees with the media’s statements that Putin is the sole cause of the war. “Putin has been warning long enough and says he wants to negotiate. But if he is ignored, if he is not heard, then that is the consequence now. The fact that others are now interfering is also no good. I’m not a fan of the US anyway, they interfere everywhere.”

Ms. Scheidemans was born in the Netherlands. She, too, must see “what I can afford,” but says she can still manage, to a certain extent. “I have a good job, but you notice that you have to withdraw money from the ATM again much sooner.” She tells us, “I have to limit myself a little. With certain kinds of fruit, I now look when they are in season and when they are cheaper. I don’t buy them now otherwise.”

She is also trying to save and buy provisions in other places. “I’m currently thinking about asking the public utility company to deduct more for my monthly bills so that I don’t end up with a big bang when it comes to the additional payment at the end of the year.”

Asked about the campaign that says people should heat their homes less because of the war, she says, “I’ve been doing that for a while too; I turn the heating down a bit and dress a bit warmer in the flat. But freezing for the sake of waging war, I don’t think that’s acceptable. Saving energy is good, but there are people who just can’t heat a little less. For example, rheumatism patients who might freeze at home in the cold season, then they only have pain, that’s simply not possible.”

We spoke to several retirees whose pensions are melting away in the face of price increases. “You can

really feel it,” Beate says about the price increases. “But we have to do a bit of shopping, what else can you do? Food prices, petrol prices, it can make you get upset.”

Asked about the massive increase in arms spending, Beate says, “Yes, I’m surprised where the money is coming from suddenly. There is never money for anything else; when we pensioners wanted something, they said there was no money. Now it’s being thrown around, you just can’t understand it. I hope we don’t have another war here.”

Dunja, also a pensioner, added, “When you think how expensive everything has become, up to €6 for cooking oil, that’s pretty steep. All food has become expensive. I must have paid 50 cents more for my courgettes, and milk has also become more expensive. It doesn’t matter if it’s discounters like Aldi or Lidl, everyone has raised prices.”

“The rich are getting richer, the poor poorer,” says pensioner Dagmar. “There is money for war, but not for us. They take everything away from us and that’s where it goes,” she says, visibly angry. Her granddaughter has equally clear words about the current war and says, “It doesn’t have to be.”

Sabrina is an outpatient geriatric nurse and looks after senior citizens for a living. She herself tries to shop and live as carefully as possible with the means she has. She says the price increases for basic foodstuffs have not affected her that much yet. “I attach more importance to quality than to quantity and I don’t usually buy meat at Lidl. We also try to save on heating.”

She looks after people “who have been through one or even two wars.” Why they should now tighten their belts for the war against Ukraine was beyond her, she says. “That’s not on. The 80-year-olds are already sitting in their flats and trembling with fear about war. They don’t want to witness another world war. They can’t sleep, they take tranquillisers.”

Referring to the Bundeswehr (armed forces), which is currently being massively rearmed, she says, “We should stay out of it.” Things were already bad enough now, she added. “I’m also sorry for people in Ukraine, but this is a bigger political thing and needs to be solved through negotiations.”

But the opposite is the case. Military and economic warfare against Russia is being pushed by all NATO

countries. Should an embargo on importing Russian gas and oil into Germany be imposed, it would have even more disastrous consequences for all workers. “At Lidl, they have already increased prices three times, but my wage has remained the same,” complained one worker who came to Duisburg from Kazakhstan more than 20 years ago.



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