

# “By mid-month we have no money left”—Workers speak out against war and inflation at Job Centres in Berlin and Duisburg

Our reporters  
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Workers and the unemployed, Hartz IV welfare recipients and students are being dramatically affected by soaring inflation and skyrocketing energy and gas prices—direct consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Ukraine war and economic sanctions against Russia. A number of workers at Job Centres spoke to WSWS reporters and opposed NATO’s proxy war against Russia, which only benefits the capitalist oligarchs.

Sara (not her real name), who spoke to the WSWS outside a Job Centre in Duisburg, is a single mother of three children. She said: “The war is bad news and the situation is catastrophic overall. Food has become so expensive. By the middle of the month I have no money left. Then I have to borrow money from wherever I can, pay back my private debts at the beginning of the month and then the whole thing starts all over again.”

Regarding increased electricity costs, Sara said, “I used to pay 50 euros a month for electricity. Then I got a high demand for additional payment from the public utility company, which caused me a lot of problems. That’s why I have increased my monthly instalment payments to 110 euros a month. I’m hoping for a refund, but haven’t heard anything yet [from the government] about the increased electricity prices. I don’t know how I’m going to pay them.”

The official price inflation rate in September was over 10 percent. According to the comparison portal Verivox, electricity prices almost doubled by the end of September. In the populous state of North Rhine-Westphalia, they have risen by an average of 74 percent. Gas prices have exploded over the same period with an average increase of 280 percent.

In one example, Verivox calculates that the costs for gas

for a single-family house with an annual consumption of 20,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) at the end of September was 5,208 euros (26.04 cents/kWh). Twelve months ago, the average cost was 1,369 euros. “That means additional costs of 3,839 euros and an increase of 280 per cent,” a Verivox spokesperson explained.

“Everything has become more expensive, many families have problems,” declared two young people passing by the Job Centre: “If you go shopping for 100 euros today, the shopping trolley is still not full. It’s enough for a week at most.”

“My parents have been told that their energy costs will increase from 400 to 1,000 euros,” a young woman reports. “My mother says she doesn’t know how she will pay. If you can’t heat in winter, you freeze.”

Her friend adds, referring to the war in Ukraine: “No one wants war and yet there it is with all its cruel consequences for those directly affected. But there is not only war in Ukraine. In Afghanistan, Somalia and other countries, wars are constantly being waged by NATO—although one hears much less about them.”

“A lot of weapons are produced by America and Germany, which are earning huge sums of money from this war,” noted a worker from Moldova who spoke to WSWS reporters outside a Job Centre in Berlin. “It is no real help when people have to sit in their flats, unemployed for years.” He adds, “Now the war is here, we are told Corona is gone and merely resembles flu. How can that be?”

“The war is very bad,” said Tayyaba, who lives together with her husband and two children. “Energy prices are going up, but our wages are not. We always talk about this problem at home. My husband is a software

developer. We also don't know if rents will go up once again, we worry about that a lot. So far the children haven't had Corona, but that's another problem for both of them."

Moses, who comes from Romania and works part-time as a construction worker in Berlin, said, "We live in difficult times. It is difficult to get a proper education or find a job. I'm Jewish and I don't work on Saturday, but the Job Centre doesn't take that into consideration. My German is not so good and that also makes things difficult."

"The Job Centre and the authorities make fun of people," Moses continues. "The institutions all work with each other and are just dumping the issue of human rights. This is bad, it only makes it more difficult for people to live together."

On war, Moses said: "The war is to blame for prices going up. And the culprit for the war in Ukraine is America. For 30 years they have not stopped waging war. Quite intelligent and educated people are working on it every day. They want to make money out of it." The fact that the German government is sending weapons to Ukraine "only makes it worse."

"They will plunge the people of Europe into a huge crisis," he continued. "Back in 2008, there was a crisis and no jobs across Europe. But now it's going to get worse. For normal working people it will be even worse, including those who are still doing well enough now. They have less and less money and their work is not properly paid for either. Food will become even more expensive. In southern Germany, a litre of petrol already costs three euros."

"Innocent people have to pay for the faults of politicians. Democracy has to be different. We need normal democracy, not capitalist democracy. People must be respected and paid better, no matter what their status. In Romania today, there is also no secure future."

Life was better before the reintroduction of capitalism in Romania in 1990, he said. "Today it's like in the jungle: only those who have an income can live and do what's necessary for the little ones. This is true not only for people, but also for entire countries. Where will this lead? There will be a big crisis."

Severin is a student and lives in Duisburg with two fellow students in a shared flat. He also told the WSWS that he has been badly affected by the war and the immense price increases: "The gas prices are worst, because now we also have a new flat and we don't know how good the heating is. We are already paying a fat

markdown, which is really difficult to cope with as a student. Then there are the food prices, which make up a large part of our costs. One really feels inflation." Severin has part-time employment and also relies on his parents for financial support.

"One of us is no longer studying and is working," Severin continues. "The two of us still at university don't receive Bafög [financial support for poorer students]. I work in retail at a big chain. Instead of the previous minimum wage, I now get 12 euros an hour, but that doesn't make much difference—I just don't work enough hours." With all the private expenses, "I really have to cut back now," says Severin: "I'm worried about the future."

Although the "daily horror stories" are devastating, Severin is following the war in Ukraine closely. Between NATO and Russia, he says, "there will probably still be major conflicts." Ukrainian President Zelensky had recently called on the NATO powers to destroy Russia's nuclear capabilities through pre-emptive strikes. Above all, the Western side must "make concessions" and "conduct negotiations" to end the war, Severin says.

Severin describes the prospect of an imminent nuclear war as a "huge catastrophe. A nuclear weapon does not respect national borders. Its use would devastate whole swathes of land and trigger huge refugee movements. Add to that the refugees from Ukraine and now Russia who don't want to go to war." A nuclear strike against Russia would result in "not only Germany but all our neighbouring countries being contaminated. Nuclear weapons shouldn't really exist."

In conclusion, Severin said: "Overcoming the capitalist system is the only thing that can still save us from all these catastrophes—be it imperialism or war or climate change. The only thing that can help is to shift to a socialist and communist state—in any event, an alternative society. Unfortunately, you can't expect anything more from the established parties."



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