

“I want to live in a world without capitalism”

Strong support for SGP election campaign in Berlin

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The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is running in Berlin’s state elections in February to give a voice and a socialist perspective to widespread opposition to war and social devastation. In its election statement, the SGP calls for €100 billion for nurseries, schools and hospitals, instead of armaments and war, together with a massive hike in wages and the expropriation of all the war and crisis profiteers.

SGP members spoke recently with many residents and passers-by in Berlin’s working class neighbourhoods who condemned the federal and state governments’ policies of massive rearmament, social cutbacks and war, and supported the SGP’s election campaign. Many workers drew a connection between NATO’s brutal proxy war in Ukraine, the looming social catastrophe and capitalism.

“The rising energy prices and the housing shortage scare me,” said **Lena**, who has lived in Berlin for 35 years. “You wonder what you’ll have left and where it is all leading. Nothing is certain. I was kicked out of my apartment even though I almost died of cancer. The Jobcentre didn’t pay the deposit and the rent, even though I was always chasing after it and begging them.”

Lena has worked as a waitress and educator and is also an artist and mother. “It’s scary that there’s so little capacity at children’s hospitals,” she said. “When I had coronavirus, I also had pneumonia.” The SGP’s call to invest €100 billion not in the military but in day-care centres, schools and hospitals is “right,” Lena said.

“I’m a pacifist and find war unbelievable in this day and age. More money should be spent on the education system. For example, every student should be given a tablet, because that is needed for homework, although many cannot afford it.” Lena welcomed the SGP’s participation in the Berlin state election and supports their socialist campaign.

“Socialism is a tradition in my family. My grandpa was a socialist and a communist and was persecuted in [Hitler’s] Third Reich. Our heart still beats on the left today. I wish you much success. It’s not acceptable that society is being destroyed on the backs of the poor. All people should have equal rights, not some more and others less.”

“I’ve lived in Berlin since I was born and I feel like everything is collapsing more and more,” said **Victor**, whom we met at Leopoldplatz in the working class district of Wedding. “What is taking place is a nationwide disaster and a car crash for the socially vulnerable. The most important issues are not being addressed by the government. When we have a chancellor who smirks about people not being able to pay their electricity bills, you know where you stand—and that’s the Social Democrats (SPD). Scholz reminds me of

[former SPD chancellor] Schröder, who waged war before him.

“Social togetherness has been destroyed more and more in the last two years. One should fight the causes of poverty and support children, not neglect them. We also have a lot of poverty and discrimination here in Germany—not only against blacks; Sinti and Roma and others who flee here are also culturally disadvantaged. Young people with mental illness die alone in their homes. I’m not rich myself, but just talking to homeless people can help them.

“Politics needs to become less dependent on business. Corporations need to be held accountable. Five hundred people are at the top and have billions stashed away in accounts somewhere. These people are mentally dead. The economy should run for the people and not against them. There is rearmament going on all over the world. This is sick, in one word, megalomania. Even the small states are rearming. In China, a new Pacific war is looming, it looks grim.

“Enmities are being stirred up to destabilize states—e.g., in Latin America and Afghanistan. The US is trying to enforce the law of the strongest with this. But I also criticize the European Union. If as a union you don’t base yourself on peaceful principles, then you spit in the face of the people who live in the refugee camps. Libya has been destroyed from the outside and from the inside. Basically, Europe is supporting slavery there now.”

Malvina, who fled Ukraine for Berlin, said, “I want to live in a world where capitalism is dead. In my country there is war. So, when I talk about crisis, this is what I mean. War is connected to many countries in Europe and around the world. Ukraine exists because of capitalism and war exists because of capitalism. It’s all connected.

“I was born in the Soviet Union just before it collapsed. It was a crisis. There was corruption everywhere, people were hungry. It was capitalism at its worst.” Malvina pleads for solidarity with all refugees and victims of war, saying, “We are the first refugees who got some rights here in Germany. Of course, I would like to see a mass movement against war.”

“I think the arms deliveries should be stopped immediately,” said **Elisabeth**. “Weapons only make everything much worse and bring more suffering. An acquaintance of mine recently gave me a book about Ukraine that described some historical developments in the country. It made me realize that it’s not so surprising how today’s situation has come about.

“Basically, none of the people in Russia or Ukraine have any interest in war. I condemn the invasion by Russia, but the fact that Zelensky is now in the US and President Biden has told him—as the newspapers report—that the war can drag on for years, that’s terrible, I

don't want that. I am against war in principle. You can't let the media drag you into an opinion bubble and ignore contradictory facts. That's what's being done on both sides."

"I am also in favour of stopping this war immediately, including the arms deliveries that keep the war going," says **Ivonne**, who works as an educator. "The social situation is going downhill more and more, also with us in the educational sector. You're not allowed to heat the premises properly anymore, you freeze, you must put on more layers, it's not fun. Normally we have a shortage of staff. At the moment we're managing, but only because so many children are sick. Food prices are also going up. I bought pastries today for €1.50, which used to cost €1.20. That's 25 percent more. Cuts are being made everywhere—in health care, education, simply everywhere."

"I must confess that I was surprised about Russia's invasion, I had great faith in diplomacy," said **Rosa**. "I also see economic interests behind the war and wonder what means can be used to end the conflict." When SGP members explained the perspective of mobilizing the working class and youth internationally against war, Rosa responded with interest: "I want to study your reports and analysis on the website and think about it more carefully."

"The social situation is catastrophic," says pensioner **Melanie**. "Inflation bothers me, and when I hear the news about Ukraine, I feel like we're being dragged into war, too. I was born in the late 1950s and my parents still talked about the misery of war. Since then, I have been to almost every demonstration against war. It has been a long time since I voted for the Greens, who have turned [to the right] so much politically, or for the Left Party. I am unsure who to vote for. I will read through your election appeal."

"I think the crisis in the health care system has to do with the fact that hospitals are being privatized," said **Christian**, who is studying industrial engineering. "To cut costs and increase profits, beds have been reduced—the logical consequence is the present crisis. Of course, I also feel the price increases when purchasing things. I have a part-time job in addition to my studies to make ends meet financially."

Paul is a trainee nurse and reports that he has been affected by the economic crisis since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. "I was a waiter, but I couldn't do the job anymore because the restaurants were closed. I then went into health care and am now training to be a nurse. But what bothers me most is that even though I'm training, I can't make ends meet with the money I get. I slave away from morning to night and still have to count every penny."

"That's why I think it's good that you are bringing attention to this crisis. Not only hospitals, but doctors' surgeries are often understaffed. With the rent, all the utilities, the electricity and gas bills—making ends meet on €850 a month is hard. I'm a trainee, but I work like a full-time employee. If we really live in a country that—as is always said—is the fourth most successful economically, how can it be that you have such difficulties building something up from your own efforts?"

Paul criticized the undemocratic measures taken against "small parties" and wanted to look further into the counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism and its socialist opponents. "You are a party I am not yet familiar with. Until now, I have always felt that Marxism or socialism could quickly slide into dictatorial features. If that were not so, I would also be a convinced socialist. I definitely want to look into these questions. I think it is good that you are drawing attention to this situation. It simply can't go on like this."

"I once saw the SGP in a previous election pretty high up on the 'Wahlomat' ['Vote-omat', a quasi-non-governmental website],"

said **Helmut**, who teaches and works at a Berlin university. "I previously voted for the Left Party because I thought this was the only left-wing party that could make it into parliament. But because of their past policies, I now don't know at all who to vote for. I want to think about your program, maybe one has to make a statement now."

In front of the Berlin Central and Regional Library, SGP members met **Sabine**, who said, "I totally agree that the war must end as soon as possible, and the arms shipments must stop. There is a massive discrepancy between the opinions being portrayed [in the media] and the majority opinion. The word pacifism is already being ridiculed; it has come to that. There has been no democratic exchange of views, no discussion of the issue since February 24."

"If you want to apply the concept of *Gleichschaltung* [enforced conformity, as practiced by the Nazis], that's exactly what took place right after that day, when €100 billion were allocated for the Bundeswehr [Armed Forces]. The democratic opinion-forming process [the right to which is anchored in the German constitution] is not taking place. We know from the history books where that leads. There was never any real denazification in Germany. The right-wing structures have been tolerated and promoted for decades. We urgently need a movement of solidarity throughout Europe."

"The Ukraine war is a proxy war of NATO, deliberately provoked and led mainly by the US," said **Erik**, who is studying library sciences and works in the field. "In my family, the topic is discussed quite hotly. There's so much negative news that you have to work hard to cope with it. The €100 billion for the Bundeswehr is just one of many breath-taking steps taken by official German politics, I think."

Erik sees a connection between the current developments towards war and the Western war policy of past decades: "Vietnam, Serbia, Yemen and many other countries were bombed before that. The media is used to get people behind it. It's always about keeping other countries in the world down."

Erik said he wanted to get involved in the work of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the SGP's youth organization. "I'm for socialism myself," he said. "My parents are from Poland, my grandpa was very active politically, helped build *Solidarno??* and was arrested one day on our doorstep because of it. I heard a lot about it from my grandparents."



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