

“The weapons help no one, it’s just about economic interests”—SGP continues campaign for Berlin state election

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The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) has been active this week on the streets and squares in the East of Berlin. In the party’s election campaign for the Berlin House of Representatives, the SGP is fighting for the construction of an international movement of the working class and youth in opposition to the war policy of the ruling class.

While condemning the Russian military’s invasion of Ukraine, the SGP declares that the imperialist powers of the NATO alliance systematically prepared for the war in Ukraine and are now relentlessly escalating it on the backs of the Ukrainian population. The SGP is the only party in the Berlin elections with a program to oppose war.

In their discussions with workers, SGP campaigners have encountered widespread opposition to war and capitalism. The liquidation of the GDR (East Germany) by Stalinism, and the subsequent reactionary policies of the nominally “left” parties, have been traumatic political experiences for millions of people. In discussions with the SGP, workers and elderly residents sought to process these experiences. Despite lingering political demoralisation, the SGP’s election campaign is being met with strong support.

On visits to housing estates, SGP members handed out piles of leaflets from their campaign van to residents who agreed to place them in the mailboxes of their fellow residents. Many were pleased that a party is running in the election that is opposed to NATO’s war policy, the unprecedented rearmament of the German military (Bundeswehr) and the ruling elite’s brutal class-war agenda. As campaigners drove past a secondary school during a break in classes, students reacted with enthusiasm to the announcement that the SGP is building a movement against war that unites people regardless of their origin and skin color.

Until well into the 2000s, the districts of Marzahn-Hellersdorf and Lichtenberg, in particular, were regarded as strongholds of the Left Party, with local and federal Left Party politicians sometimes achieving absolute majorities in elections. However, the right-wing policies of the Left Party in government have created enormous social bitterness and political confusion in recent decades, from which the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has recently benefited. For example, federal parliament (Bundestag) Vice-President Petra Pau’s share of the vote in her constituency of Marzahn-Hellersdorf has fallen continuously, from 48 percent (2009) to just under 22 percent (2021)—a loss of more than 12 percentage points compared to the 2017 Bundestag election—while the AfD was able to rise to third place.

Lichtenberg

“It’s insane,” said Otto, a pensioner who stopped to listen to an SGP rally in front of a supermarket in Lichtenberg. “NATO thinks it can drive the Russian-speaking population out of the eastern regions of Ukraine, even though people there see themselves as Russians. I am generally against war, but we must also raise our voices against this particular war, in which some are earning a pretty penny. We should calculate how many millions of euros are being made by war profiteers for each Ukrainian or Russian murdered in this war.”

Otto recalled the horrors of the Second World War and warned that a third world war would dwarf it. “I am a person who grew up under Hitler,” he said. “At that time, entire urban areas were razed to the ground. Today, a war like the one threatened would cost at least 400 million lives.”

At a Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe (Berlin Transit Company, BVG) depot in Lichtenberg, SGP campaigners met Leon, a trainee at the BVG. He said: “Politicians are all gangsters. Everyone wants to impose the same thing and it always ends up with the same policy, only by other means. You don’t know anything about the economic interests in the war—you only hear what they present to us.”

Leon believes that the rearming of the Bundeswehr will have devastating social consequences. “The money could be used to better pay for the important underpaid jobs—I am thinking especially of the nurses,” he said. “But that does not happen. On the contrary, many will suffer.”

The unification of the working class at the international level is an “interesting approach,” Leon said, adding, “I will read your appeal carefully.”

Aaron, who works as a driver for the BVG, asked, “I am from Kosovo—are you also against the war in my country?” After SGP members affirmed this and said that the German government was rekindling the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia at the same time that it was waging the proxy war in Ukraine, Aaron nodded and said: “I think mainly about the children. The borders were closed and someone who went there over Christmas could hardly come back. Especially the children suffer, although they can’t help it, but the governments don’t care. I only hope that few people will participate in the war if it should come to that. Most people don’t want war.”

In front of a high school center in Marzahn-Hellersdorf, SGP campaigners met Alex, who runs a café next to the schoolyard. He said: “All the world’s powers are active in Ukraine, as they were in Syria. War is always a huge business. Even during the COVID pandemic, the ‘financial aid’ was too much to die on and too little to live on. I fear that our vote will not make a real difference in the elections.”

When the campaigners explained that the SGP viewed its election campaign as part of an international initiative to build a mass movement against war, Alex took several leaflets to place in his café and concluded, “If all the people would stand up and say, ‘This far and no further’—then you could make a difference. I come from the Kurdish regions and from a very political family, which is why the double standards of European governments make me very angry. There seem to be first- and second-class refugees in their eyes. I think all people are worth the same amount. It is good that more and more people are speaking out against the war.”

Rainer, who works for a theater technology company in Austria, said: “I find it perfidious how politicians and the media distort the truth and engage in opinion-making. I only need to hear phrases like ‘weapons aid’ or ‘military support’ and I get sick. The weapons don’t help anyone, it’s all about economic interests. It is disgusting that a nuclear war is risked for this.

“If you were to invest the money in schools instead of rearmament—the schools desperately need €100 billion—then you would make a real contribution. It wouldn’t cost a lot of money to provide students with free books and learning materials. It would also not cost much money to accommodate all the homeless people appropriately. And there’s so much more to do. We need the masses behind us so we can make a difference. We did not say ‘We are the people’ in 1989 in vain.”

“I myself am not as hard hit by inflation as others—but only because I live alone,” said Pascal, who is 37 and works as a building cleaner. “My brother has a family with four children who need clothes, school supplies and other things for their development. The price increases hit him particularly hard.”

On the development of the war, Pascal said: “The Ukrainian war is dangerous, but so were the other wars in Iraq and Libya. Of course, if people lose their homes there, they will have to flee to safe countries. If I had grown up there, I would probably have fled to Germany. Some of my colleagues blame our problems on refugee flows, but I think that workers should not let themselves be incited against each other. After all, it is economic interests that trigger the wars.”

To the extent that some passers-by said in discussions that they supported the AfD, in most cases this came from deep frustration and was a protest against the right-wing policies of the so-called “left” parties. An elderly resident explained that she was not surprised that the AfD received electoral votes after successive “left” governments had for decades organized a social catastrophe. “But if the AfD came to power, the same thing would happen as under the Nazis,” she said. “That can’t be allowed to happen.”

Marzahn-Hellersdorf is also home to Alice Salomon College (ash), which trains students in the social, health and educational fields and maintains many international contacts. On Alice Salomon Square in front of the college, a pensioner said in passing: “I have to say, ‘Hats off!’ I think your position is great.” Another pensioner who accepted

an election leaflet said, “Your posters are the only sensible thing I have seen so far in the election campaign.”

“August Bebel, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht—they represent great ideals. You can’t say anything about that,” said Nebojša, who studies social work at ash. “But the SPD has betrayed the workers for a long time. Who has Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht on their conscience? Who struck down the Berlin uprising? I am from Serbia and I lived in Yugoslavia as a child. So I know what the politics of the Greens and the SPD mean—they were at the forefront of the war campaign. Even before the Kosovo war, Germany recognized Croatia and Slovenia and fueled the conflict.

“Today, everything is being cut and Germany is militarizing again. Germany supports NATO and produces weapons. If it goes on like this, it won’t end well. You’re against it, I think that’s good.

“Since the 1990s, the workers’ movement has lost its influence. Nevertheless, the class struggle is more present than ever, but it is not perceived. What is needed is more empowerment and political education in schools, and an international movement. The only way to change this is through workers’ democracy. But works councils are nonsense because they do not want to take action against their ‘own’ company. I think what you’re doing is great.”

When Berlin Mayor Franziska Giffey (SPD) was invited by the college administration to the celebration in honour of the college’s namesake last May, many students and the student representative council protested against Giffey’s visit. They denounced her “racist and misanthropic policies” that “do not fit the values of the college,” and demanded Giffey’s resignation.

Else (83) is a pensioner. Following talks with SGP members, she immediately visited the district hall to vote for the party by postal ballot.

She said, “I don’t understand the world anymore. How can such wars be fought today? I can still remember the time when I was little and we had to shelter from the bombs in the basement. Afterwards we saw all the destruction.

“I grew up in the East. After reunification, I thought the Cold War was finally over and the world was getting better. But life became harder, more hectic, more expensive. Now I can barely cope with my pension. This war draws us all in. I am very afraid that it will spread.”

“Putin should never have given the order to invade,” said Robin (17), who is a trainee in vehicle paintwork and met us at the Cecilienhof. “This was a trap, because NATO stands behind Ukraine, has trained soldiers there and has supplied modern weapons. They should never have sent such weapons, because the whole thing can become a nuclear war that would wipe out all life. I don’t want to see Bundeswehr representatives standing in front of my workplace one day and all young people moving in for military service. I’ll be 18 in eight days and I’ll probably vote SGP.”

Robin also intends to get involved with the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE)—the youth movement of the SGP and its sister parties—and come to the SGP rally on Alice Salomon Square at 2 p.m. on Saturday.



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