Thousands protest in Berlin against massive public service cuts

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On December 5, thousands of teachers, public employees, artists and cultural workers, carers and educators protested in Berlin against the Berlin Senate's plans to cut billions of euros from the city's budgets for education, culture, health and other areas.

In the social and education sector, the Senate cuts threaten funding for youth social work, integration projects, programmes for the homeless, addiction counselling and digitalisation processes in schools.

Trade unions, social organisations and schools called for a rally in front of the Senate under the slogan #Unkürzbar (#Uncuttable), attended by around 5,000 protesters, including several primary school classes plus parents and teachers.

The Senate has threatened to implement devastating cuts and job cuts to Berlin's social fabric, including its main charitable organisations (AWO, Caritas and Diakonie), whereupon the chairpersons of these organisations claimed they were "systemically relevant" to the "functioning of the economy"—as the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic had shown. The supposedly "mitigated" result nevertheless amounts to "huge social cuts to take place in installments," according to Oliver Bürgel, director of the AWO.

A total of €370 million [$US 390.6 million] is to be cut from the education budget, as well as €14 million from the expansion of day care centres. In the cultural sector, 12 percent of the total budget will be cut. Around €660 million are also to be cut from the budget for mobility, transport and the environment, which accounts for almost 20 percent of the total budget. Subsidies to the student union will also fall by €7.5 million.

Campaigners from the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) discussed a socialist perspective against the policy of social cuts, which has been supported and promoted by all parties in the Bundestag and the Berlin Senate for decades, with participants in the demonstration. The SGP's call for the Bundestag elections on February 23 states:

> This all-party coalition in favour of war and cuts has deep objective causes. In the face of the capitalist crisis, the ruling class is focussing on war abroad and class war at home in order to defend its wealth and overwhelm its competitors. This is why all the ghosts of the past are returning. Germany is at war with the nuclear power Russia, democratic rights are under attack and the fascists of the Alternative for Germany AfD are being courted by all parties.

With regard to the Senate's policy, SGP members explained that the billions saved are to be channelled into war policy and rearmament and that the struggle against the cuts must therefore be directly linked to the struggle against war. Instead of making hundreds of billions of euros available for arming German troops and continuing the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, these sums must be used for schools, day care centres, clinics and social services.

Consequently, entire groups of demonstrators signed in favour of allowing the SGP to stand in the Bundestag elections.

In a conversation with an SGP member, a teacher said:

> I heard what you said and I'll sign too. I think

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it’s important to unite internationally and I’m also in favour of socialism. Decisions about war and peace or climate change must not be left to the big corporations and financial markets. The conditions at our day care centre are unbearable, there is a lack of money and staff.

A media worker (55) in a service company said:

If you are Trotskyists, then I will support you and sign the petition. I want nothing to do with those who call themselves communists but have never spoken out clearly against the oppression of people under Stalin’s dictatorship in Russia.

A young man who works in geriatric care said:

I’ve heard that small parties now have to collect thousands of signatures in the short time available and in cold weather to even be allowed to take part in the election. That is completely undemocratic. We need a diversity of political programmes. The way the current parties in the Bundestag are acting cannot continue. Our needs are not being taken into account at all. When it was elected, the ruling coalition did not receive a mandate to ramp up the arms industry and invest 100 billion of our taxpayers’ money in weapons to fuel the wars in Ukraine and Palestine. I don’t know all of your policies yet, but I support the fight against fascism, against arms deliveries and against the genocide in Gaza, for socialism and, above all, for internationalism.

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