

Workers support SGP decision to contest German elections, criticise war and social cuts

Our reporters
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In recent weeks, teams from the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) have collected signatures in numerous cities in Germany to enable the SGP to gain ballot status in the federal elections on February 23, including in Berlin and Leipzig. In our discussions with hundreds of workers, young people and pensioners about our election statement, two questions were the main focus: the global development of war and the deep social crisis.

Berlin

A woman worker in the East Berlin district of Lichtenberg signed for the SGP because she rejected the military build-up and social cuts. “How can they spend billions on war or on a new parliament building while at the same time schools are falling apart and the toilets are filthy?” she asked. She was also outraged that politicians are closely enmeshed with big business and that MPs are handsomely compensated for their lobbying work. “I have to work hard and see how I can pay my bills. My Christmas bonus was recently used up in full for the back payment of utility costs,” she said, referring to the dramatic housing situation in Berlin.

At Leopoldplatz in Berlin’s Wedding district, the SGP spoke to a worker who originally came from Kazakhstan and was concerned about the risk of war. If “Taurus” cruise missiles were delivered to Ukraine, it could lead to a third world war, he said. At the same time, he himself lives in a precarious situation. Because of the high rents, he cannot afford a permanent place to live and is currently moving from friend to friend.

At the SGP bookstall, he spotted writings by Leon Trotsky, whom he already knew something about because of his Kazakh background. But why should he buy the books when he urgently needed the money for his rent, he asked. SGP members explained to him that we are fighting to build a movement against capitalism, the root of this social evil. To do that, a clear political understanding was needed and the books of the Mehring Verlag are central to this. He purchased *Permanent Revolution*, a key work by Trotsky.

A former teacher from Kazakhstan who signed up for the SGP in Frankfurter Allee was also following the escalation of war in Eastern Europe and social developments in Germany with great concern. She said that the schools were now in such a catastrophic state that children could hardly learn anything.

She had grown up in the Soviet Union, where many problems existed and her family was also affected by the Stalinist terror, but there was still a certain social cohesion. Today, she said, everyone was fighting for themselves to make ends meet. The daily stress in Germany was enormous, which also put a strain on social relationships. Radical changes were needed, she said. But for that to happen, “masses would have to take to the streets.”

A Ukrainian refugee and mother spoke to the SGP about her experiences in the war in Ukraine. Her son had fled to Germany to avoid being drafted into military service. She followed him here and now works as a cleaner.

“The young men are now dying at the front. For what? I ask. So that [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky travels around Europe, holding out his hand and then putting the money in his own pocket!” She was outraged by the wealth of the oligarchs, on the one hand and the great social hardship on the other. “Ukraine is a beautiful country, but it has always been bitterly poor. And now we also have war. We have Zelensky to thank for that.” Many houses are already in ruins, and people only have electricity for a few hours a day. In view of the drastic conditions, she sends her friends in Ukraine clothes and other support.

She herself had experienced the devastating consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, she said. As a staff member at a school, she did not receive a salary for several months after 1991, when the Soviet Union was dissolved by the Stalinist bureaucracy. She could only put food on the table for her young children with great difficulty. Eventually, she moved to Moscow to find work there. In the war, both regimes in Russia and Ukraine were inciting and dividing people, she said.

An 88-year-old pensioner, born in 1938, supported the SGP’s decision to stand in the election, commenting, “The biggest destroyer of the climate is war.” He had experienced the Second World War in Berlin as a child. “The many deaths, the hunger, the ruins. I still remember that well,” he said. That is why he was angry when he heard Green Party Economics Minister Robert Habeck say on television that he is not afraid of war. “What is this man thinking? What does he think war means? He has no idea.”

He also saw a continuity with the Nazi era in the policy of war against Russia and called today’s war proponents “the new Teutonic Knights,” who are once again setting out for Russia. He alluded to the aims of the Hitler regime, which invaded Poland in 1939 and began the war of extermination against the Soviet Union in 1941 to create German *lebensraum* (“living space”) in the east and to economically exploit and subjugate the entire region.

A passer-by in Tempelhof who signed up for the SGP to stand in the election also vented his anger at Habeck because he had just called for a drastic increase in military spending to 3.5 percent of economic output. There was nothing left of the old peace movement among the Greens. Instead, they were now among the warmongers and no longer electable for him, he said.

Omar, a Palestinian who had fled Lebanon to Germany 50 years ago, signed for the SGP because of its clear stance in the fight against the genocide in Gaza. He displayed videos of the crimes against Palestinian children on his mobile phone that he had shared on social media. The genocide was taking place live in front of the whole world: “No one can claim, as they did in 1945, that they didn’t know.” He was particularly disgusted by the Green Party foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, who openly defended the Israeli military’s attacks on schools and hospitals in

a Bundestag speech.

When asked how the Gaza war could be ended, he reacted thoughtfully and somewhat at a loss. He recalled the 1993 Oslo Accords between the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) under Yasser Arafat and Israel, which was broken and ultimately “brought no peace.” SGP members discussed with him why the bourgeois nationalist policies of the Arab regimes and Palestinian bourgeoisie have failed in the Middle East and that an international anti-war movement must be built in the working class. Omar noted down details of the new book by David North, *The Logic of Zionism*, which he said he would read.

An 18-year-old girl who was on her way to the library in Berlin-Kreuzberg also signed because she rejected the genocide in Gaza. Most people were against the genocide, she was convinced. But the government was supporting the war against the will of the people.

Tamara, an African American from the US, also criticised the warmongering policies of Germany and the US. She said that the Democrats were no alternative to the fascist Trump. Whether Kamala Harris, Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama—they had all tried to exploit the women’s or race issues, but ultimately they had continued to wage war and done nothing to improve conditions for working people. That was why she was against dividing people according to national, ethnic or identity-political criteria.

In addition to the issue of war, many Berliners express concern about the enormous social crisis that is directly affecting them. One woman said she received a €4,000 payment demand from Vonovia, one of Germany’s largest real estate companies, at the turn of the year. “I can’t pay that. What should I do? I was told to get a lawyer. But that won’t do any good. These corporations do whatever they want.” She also had to take care of her sick husband, which meant additional costs. She was now completely disappointed in all the parties.

A 25-year-old metal worker and his girlfriend signed for the SGP in Tempelhof because it stands for social equality. He works for the minimum wage and recently negotiated in vain with his employer for a small raise of €1 per hour. He had previously worked on the checkout at an Edeka supermarket: “I was refused the coronavirus bonus during the pandemic because I was not a permanent employee.” While prices and housing costs rose, wages simply remained low, he said. He knew from his father and grandfather what social achievements there used to be: “Christmas bonuses or regular wage increases were still standard. Today, there is no such thing,” he said.

Leipzig

In just a few days, SGP members collected enough support signatures in the north of Leipzig to stand Martin Mauer as a candidate in the Leipzig I constituency. Mauer will appear on the ballot in Leipzig Nord with the slogan: “Against war and capitalism! Stop the genocide in Gaza.”

The widespread opposition to the war in Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza was also the main reason for supporting the SGP there. Older people in particular remembered the horrors of the last world war.

Siegmund, almost 92 years old, was settled in Poland with his parents in 1940 when he was 7 years old. “Three or four years later, we fled back to Germany in a horse-drawn carriage,” he reported. He wanted to avoid a repeat of that at all costs and therefore immediately signed for the SGP candidate Mauer to stand in the election.

A 93-year-old woman, close to tears, told of her war experiences. She had to flee East Prussia with her mother and nine siblings; her father had been killed in action. “When I saw the first pictures from the war in Ukraine, I cried for two days,” she said. Since then, she no longer watches

news reports about the war. She can’t bear it.

Two young Palestinian men signed for Martin Mauer’s campaign and exchanged contact details with him to become active in Leipzig. Mauer had explained to them the principled position of the SGP on the genocide in Gaza, which fights for the unification of the Arab, Persian and Jewish working class in the struggle for the United Socialist States in the Middle East.

Many more spontaneously signed when they heard that the SGP is putting the fight against armament and social cuts at the centre of its election campaign. One of them was Thomas, a social worker and currently unemployed. He feared that the next federal government will leave nothing of the welfare state: “If [Christian Democrat chancellor candidate Friedrich] Merz or even [Alternative for Germany (AfD) chancellor candidate Alice] Weidel get a chance, the social fabric will no longer exist. Merz will blow it apart.”

The already far advanced social catastrophe has driven more than a few people into the arms of the far-right AfD. The sentiment that “those at the top do whatever they want anyway” and “elections won’t change anything” was widespread. Some therefore replied that they were voting “blue,” that is, for the AfD.

But resistance to the danger of fascism is also developing. Numerous younger Leipzig residents signed up for the SGP in order to take a stand against the far right. Lena specifically asked about our position on immigration and refugees. When she was told that the SGP defends the right of every person to live and work wherever they want, she signed up. She also approved of the SGP’s position that refugees were fleeing from wars that the federal government was waging or supporting. “I don’t know yet what I’ll vote for,” she said. The leftists have disqualified themselves through their policies, and she doesn’t want to vote for the BSW because of their anti-immigrant policies.

In the numerous discussions that the SGP is conducting in Duisburg, and in the Ruhr, to support SGP deputy chairman Dietmar Gaisenkersting as a direct candidate, it became clear that there is deep unrest in the working class, among young people and sections of the middle class, and that a social explosion is looming. But at the same time, there is a great deal of political disorientation. People are looking for answers to the many social questions they face.

Speaking at Leopoldplatz in Berlin, Wedding, SGP chair and lead candidate Christoph Vandreier commented on the response to the petition drive:

We are standing in the federal elections to build an international movement against war and its root cause, capitalism. The only way to prevent a catastrophe and world war is for workers to intervene independently in political events. To do this, they need a socialist perspective directed against capitalism. We are fighting for this perspective in these elections. That is why you should join the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei! Support our election campaign and make as generous a donation as possible so that we can make this election a success and build an international movement.



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