

SGP in the Berlin state election: How can the war madness be stopped?

Christoph Vandreier
24 August 2026

Christoph Vandreier, chairman of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), delivered the following speech in the party's first video for the Berlin state election.

A warm welcome to the first video from the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei for the Berlin state election on September 20. In the coming weeks, this video series will discuss the central questions of the election campaign: war, the brutal cuts in social provision, the rise of the extreme right—and the socialist perspective with which we oppose them.

During our campaign, we have spoken with thousands of workers, neighbours and young people. And one thing is very clear: never since the Second World War has there been such hatred of the government and of all the establishment parties—and never has there been such deep concerns about the drift towards war.

Both are more than justified.

The danger of a nuclear war that would call into question the very survival of human civilisation has never been greater than it is today. Almost daily, the territory of a nuclear power is being attacked with German and American drones and missiles. Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Defence Minister Boris Pistorius state quite openly that within three years, Germany must be capable of defeating Russia militarily. A nuclear power! Pistorius has named 2029 as the year by which Germany must be “fit for war.” And Merz says: “We are not at war, but we are also no longer at peace.”

Have Merz and Pistorius spent even a single second considering what Europe, what Germany, would look like after such a “victory” over a nuclear power? There would be nothing left to govern. Only radioactive ash.

In the last invasion of Russia, the German elites committed the worst crimes in human history—27 million dead in the Soviet Union, the industrialised mass murder of Europe's Jews, the devastation of entire regions. Now they are risking even the nuclear annihilation of the whole world to enforce their economic interests.

To carry out this madness, they are slashing everything in sight: receiving a pension after 45 years of contributions, *Bürgergeld* (basic income support), the health and education budgets. The Merz-Klingbeil government is destroying the last remnants of the welfare state.

While the health budget has been slashed from €65 billion in 2022 to €14.3 billion in the 2027 draft budget over the space of five years, the military budget has shot up over the same period from €64.4 billion to €151.3 billion. This figure includes the core military budget, the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) “special fund” and spending on arming Ukraine. This is by far the largest military budget since Hitler.

The whole of society is being subordinated to the requirements of war. Conscription is being reintroduced. “Comprehensive defence” is turning every school, every hospital, every public authority into a cog in the war machine. Bundeswehr youth officers are being given privileged access to classrooms. In Berlin, Education Senator (state minister) Katharina Günther-Wünsch has signed a cooperation agreement with the

Bundeswehr—the army is now openly recruiting in schools.

Industry in particular has been hit by the war policy. A quarter of a million industrial jobs have already been destroyed since 2019, more than 100,000 in the auto industry and among suppliers alone. And this is now set to be dwarfed. VW alone plans to destroy a further 100,000 jobs and close four plants in Germany employing around 40,000 workers. The former flagship of “social partnership”—between the unions, management and the state—has become the trailblazer of the jobs massacre. The trade unions are putting up no resistance—instead, they are the ones enforcing the cuts against the workers. IG Metall agreed as far back as December 2024 to the elimination of 35,000 jobs—and went along with wage cuts of up to 20 percent.

The layoffs are the direct result of the war policy. On the one hand, rising energy costs are driving companies abroad, but above all, German corporations are positioning themselves for trade war on the backs of the workers. They are not posting losses—they simply want to push their profit margins above the international average.

Many plants are being converted to arms production. In the middle of Berlin's Wedding district, Rheinmetall is producing artillery shells in a former car parts factory—the first arms production in a densely populated working class district of Berlin since the Second World War. Dozens of tech firms that originally researched civilian applications are switching to military drone technology. And this comes at workers' expense. They are not simply being taken on—they are expected to do more with fewer staff and guarantee an effective war machine. They are being made to produce the weapons that they or their children will use to kill.

The most important news about the Berlin election is this: there is a party that stands opposed to this madness—the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei. We demand the immediate withdrawal of all German troops from Eastern Europe and from all foreign deployments, an end to military aid for Ukraine and Israel, the dissolution of NATO and the abolition of conscription. We demand that the enormous industrial and technological capabilities be used to build homes, hospitals and schools—not weapons. We are not interested in lucrative posts and ministerial offices—together with our sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International, we are building a worldwide movement against war.

But in order to stop the war, one must understand where it comes from. What are the reasons for the war? What are its driving forces?

It is certainly not about freedom and international law. The German government has thrown its full support behind the criminal war of aggression against Iran, which violates international law in every respect. Trump openly threatens to “bomb Iran, with its 93 million inhabitants, back to the Stone Age”—and the German government backs this. In its support for the horrific genocide in Gaza, which Israel is now extending to Lebanon, Berlin shows just what atrocities it is prepared to countenance in order to enforce its geostrategic and economic interests.

In Ukraine too, it is not about peace and freedom but, as 80 years ago,

control of raw materials and markets. The NATO powers systematically provoked the reactionary Russian invasion and are escalating the war ever further in order to plunder Ukraine, subjugate Russia and gain access to its vast raw materials. If there is a difference between the capitalist oligarchic regime in Kiev and the one in Moscow, it is that Zelensky persecutes opponents of the war even more brutally than Putin does.

On Monday, our comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk was sentenced to 15 years in prison for high treason. Given the appalling prison conditions in Ukraine, this amounts to a death sentence. His crime? He had spoken out against the war and campaigned for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against their respective oligarchs. Together with our sister parties and the *World Socialist Web Site*, the SGP is running a worldwide campaign for his freedom. The fight for Bogdan expresses the central socialist task in this war: the unification of workers in Ukraine, Russia and around the world against nationalism, imperialism and capitalism. We will be broadcasting a separate rally contribution on precisely this subject later on.

No, the German government is not concerned with peace and freedom. It is pursuing the same aims that were central to the last two world wars. Hundreds of thousands of young Ukrainian and Russian men have already fallen victim to this madness.

The war in Ukraine, the war against Iran, the genocide in Gaza, the preparations for war in the Pacific—these are not isolated conflicts. They are part of a global conflict over the redivision of the world. A third world war is no longer a theoretical question—it is unfolding before our eyes!

And, as in 1914 and 1939, it is the deep crisis of capitalism that leads to war. As far back as his groundbreaking work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin established that imperialist wars “are absolutely inevitable under such an economic system, as long as private property in the means of production exists.”

Capitalism is a completely dysfunctional and rotten social system that has nothing left to offer humanity but barbarism, climate collapse and war. Every fibre of society is being oriented towards the enrichment of a narrow layer of the super-rich.

Social inequality has reached historically unprecedented levels everywhere in the world. Globally, the richest 1 percent own almost 44 percent of all wealth. The poorer half of humanity—4 billion people—together own just half a percent. The 12 richest men in the world own more than these 4 billion people combined. In the past year alone, billionaire wealth grew by 2.5 trillion dollars—an increase that is almost equal to the entire wealth of the poorer half of the world’s population.

In Germany, the wealth of the 500 richest people has nearly tripled over the past 15 years—to €1.16 trillion, more than twice the entire federal budget. In the first year of Merz’s chancellorship, the number of centi-millionaires—people with fortunes of more than \$100 million—rose from 3,700 to 5,000. And in this situation, Merz declares: “We can no longer afford the welfare state.” We say: We can no longer afford the rich, and we can no longer afford rearmament!

This development will not slow down with rapid technological progress—it will intensify. Robotics and artificial intelligence have the potential to give every person on the planet a happy and fulfilling life. Necessary labour could be massively reduced and vast resources devoted to education and health.

But under capitalism, this technological development instead leads to mass unemployment, misery and war. As Marx already revealed, the mechanisation of production leads to the concentration of capital in ever fewer hands and to intensified exploitation. Corporations are using AI and automation to destroy jobs, drive up the pace of work and squeeze ever higher profits from shrinking workforces. This crisis leads to ever more brutal attacks on the workers—and to war.

The modern means of production can now only exist internationally. An AI data centre requires the cooperation of workers across the entire world.

Chip production alone requires raw materials, specialised machinery and software from dozens of countries—lithium from Chile, lithography machines from the Netherlands, manufacturing in Taiwan, design in the United States. The productive forces have long since outgrown the national framework. No car, no smartphone, no medicine is still made within a single country. Through production, humanity is more closely interconnected than at any previous point in its history.

But capitalism is organised into nation-states. And so, the unification of the world in a single global production process, under capitalist conditions, leads not to a peaceful world community but to world war.

As early as 1915, in the face of the First World War, Leon Trotsky formulated this with prophetic clarity:

The present war is at bottom a revolt of the forces of production against the political form of nation and state. ... the real, objective significance of the War is the breakdown of the present national economic centres, and the substitution of a world economy in its stead. But the way the governments propose to solve this problem of imperialism is not through the intelligent, organized cooperation of all of humanity’s producers, but through the exploitation of the world’s economic system by the capitalist class of the victorious country; which country is by this War to be transformed from a Great Power into a World Power.

That was true in 1914, it was true in 1939, and it is true again today. Capitalism can no longer master the immense productive forces it has itself created—except through war.

There can be no peaceful capitalism. The fundamental driving forces of this system lead, as in the 20th century, to world war! Capitalism must be overthrown; the big banks and corporations must be expropriated and placed under democratic control! This is precisely the perspective for which our comrade Bogdan fought so courageously in Ukraine: the unification of workers against the oligarchs and warmongers in their own country!

This cannot simply be achieved at the ballot box. It can only be achieved if the workers intervene independently in political affairs! And our election campaign serves to politically prepare for exactly that.

The correctness of this analysis is shown most clearly by the fact that all the parties support the policy of war and the enrichment of the wealthy. Whatever they say during the election campaign, after the elections they vote for rearmament and press ahead with social attacks.

The governing coalition of Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) is implementing rearmament with bureaucratic cold-bloodedness and destroying the last remnants of the welfare state. The Greens, once pacifists, have become the vilest warmongers. They criticise the government from the right, demand an escalation of the war against Russia and call for even more rearmament.

The Left Party and its splinter group, Sahra Wagenknecht’s BSW, like to talk about peace and stoke the illusion that it could be achieved through a bit more diplomacy. Given the global crisis and worldwide rearmament, this is absurd! In reality, the talk of a “peace-loving Germany” is just the cloak the Left Party wraps around itself to support the war policy.

This is the very same party that voted in favour of the trillion-euro war credits in the upper house of parliament and then enabled Merz’s swift election as chancellor. Its then-chairman, Jan van Aken, even applauded the assassination of Iranian government officials by the United States. And wherever it shares power at state level, it carries out the necessary cuts. In Berlin, it first bailed out the Bankgesellschaft with billions and then clawed the money back from workers through wage cuts, the sale of 150,000 publicly owned flats and cuts to education and health. For 16

years it co-governed this city and helped create the social misery from which Berlin suffers today. Now, Elif Eralp, the Left Party's lead candidate in Berlin, stands ready to continue this policy as mayor. Her declared role model is New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who owed his election to the massive opposition to Trump—and then held a “productive” meeting with Trump at the White House even before taking office. This is how they all operate: grandiose promises during the campaign, betrayal the day after.

It is precisely this right-wing policy pursued in the name of left-wing politics that provides fertile ground for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Time and again in the campaign, we encounter workers who want nothing to do with the AfD's positions but say they would vote for it in protest against the policies of the other parties. They perceive the AfD as an opponent of the hated establishment.

But it is not. The AfD pursues the policy of war and cuts with even greater aggression. It is not an alternative to the other parties but pushes rearmament and social attacks to the extreme. It is being deliberately built up to brutally suppress all resistance. It was the AfD that was the first to demand 5 percent of GDP be spent on arms. Now every party is putting this policy into practice. The AfD wants to massively expand the state apparatus and crush all opposition to militarism and brutal social cuts. Its incitement against refugees serves this purpose: it blames the weakest in society for the social catastrophe created by rearmament and the enrichment of the wealthy.

Workers have already had the same experience with Trump, who initially presented himself as an anti-establishment candidate and is now aggressively implementing the interests of the super-rich oligarchs: at home against the workers, and around the world through war. The Democrats support this policy because they speak for the same oligarchy.

And now the Left Party tells us that the AfD can be stopped by cooperating with the CDU. It decided exactly this at its most recent party conference. One might just as well try to put out a fire with the help of the arsonist. In other words, the Left Party wants to stop the AfD by joining ever more right-wing coalitions and pushing through ever harsher social attacks. In reality, this does not stop the AfD—it paves the way for it.

It is worth recalling that Hitler did not simply fall from the sky either. Even before it brought Hitler to power, the German ruling class had been governing in an increasingly dictatorial manner. As early as March 1930, Chancellor Heinrich Brüning was ruling by emergency decree, bypassing the Reichstag (parliament). The SPD supported this on the grounds that new elections could strengthen Hitler and destabilise the economy.

After President Hindenburg dropped Brüning, he installed the presidential cabinets of von Papen and von Schleicher, which no longer held any legitimacy through the Reichstag whatsoever. Nonetheless, the SPD campaigned for Hindenburg's re-election in 1932—to prevent Hitler, as they put it.

Yet it was this same Hindenburg, whom the SPD had supported, who then appointed Hitler as Reich Chancellor on January 30, 1933. Two months later, every bourgeois party voted for the Enabling Act, even though the Nazi Party had failed to win a majority in the Reichstag despite conditions of massive terror.

Today's Left Party cannot be compared to the SPD of that era, which still had millions of followers in the working class. The Left Party is a right-wing, bourgeois party. But the argument that fascism can be prevented by ever more right-wing regimes is just as false today as it was then. Precisely the opposite is the case.

Hitler was brought to power by the ruling class to suppress all resistance to the massive social attacks and to prepare Germany for a new world war. Along the way, democratic rights were dismantled step by step.

It is the same today. The enormous social inequality and the insane war policy are incompatible with democratic rights. That is why demonstrations against the genocide in Gaza are being banned, opponents

of war silenced, surveillance expanded and the entire state apparatus prepared to suppress growing social opposition. That is why all the capitalist parties are moving to the right, adopting the AfD's programme and strengthening the fascists. Within the CDU, SPD and Liberal Democratic Party (FDP), the voices calling for cooperation with the AfD are growing louder—a cooperation already long practised at EU level. Sahra Wagenknecht's BSW is even offering itself as a majority-maker for an AfD “government of experts.”

The only way to stop the AfD and the rightward shift as a whole is an international movement of the working class against the root of fascism and war: capitalism.

And the objective conditions for such a movement already exist. All over the world, workers are beginning to fight back against war and cutbacks. Last autumn in Italy, more than 2 million people brought over a hundred cities to a standstill in a general strike against the genocide in Gaza. In France, hundreds of thousands took to the streets against the government's austerity measures. In the United States, the centre of world imperialism, 8 million people demonstrated against Trump in March—the largest protest action in the country's history.

Germany too is seething: at VW, at ZF Group, at Bosch, in the public sector, in the hospitals—everywhere, anger is growing over wage theft, job cuts and the transformation of society into a war machine. Workers want to fight. But every time resistance stirs, it is the trade unions and the so-called left parties that smother it. IG Metall is concluding company agreements that lock in wage cuts of up to 20 percent. Verdi calls “warning strikes” only to then sell a real-wage loss as a “negotiating success.”

That is why the fight for the independence of the working class from all these national and bourgeois organisations is the central task. Our election campaign serves this end.

Berlin is not short of groups that talk about socialism but end up simply supporting the Left Party.

The groups Arbeiterinnenmacht and Sozialistische Organisation Solidarität recently came together at a meeting of the “Left within the Left” to discuss the framework within which they will support the Left Party's election campaign. They are deliberately fostering the illusion that this thoroughly bourgeois party could stop the cuts, oppose war and disarm the police. They must believe that every single Berliner is suffering from amnesia.

The Revolutionäre Internationale Organisation (RIO), which stood against the Left Party with its own candidates in the Bundestag (federal parliament) elections, has since crawled back into its lap. It states that it supports the “Left within the Left” and will campaign for candidates who oppose participation in government.

These organisations are doing everything they can to keep the workers under the control of bourgeois parties and the trade unions.

But what is needed is precisely the opposite! Workers must intervene in political affairs as an independent force! That is why we support the building of rank-and-file action committees—international and independent of the trade union apparatuses. These committees must take decision-making out of the hands of corporate boards and trade union officials and organise the fight against layoffs, cuts and the war policy. With the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), we have launched a network linking these committees across companies and national borders—from the VW plant in Wolfsburg to the autoworkers in Detroit, who are fighting against the same corporations and the same war policy.

But above all, workers need their own party! A party rooted in historical experience that declares war on every political adaptation to the existing order. The SGP builds on the great revolutionary traditions of the German and international workers' movement: on August Bebel; on Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who fought against the First World War

and were murdered for it; on Lenin and the October Revolution, which for the first time in history brought workers to power in 1917; and on Leon Trotsky, who founded the Fourth International against the betrayal of Stalinism, and whose German section we are. This tradition is no folklore—it is the accumulated strategic experience of 150 years of class struggle, and it is the only answer to a ruling class that is once again drawing on its own tradition of imperialism, war and fascism. Ulrich Rippert will address this in more detail in his contribution.

That is why it is so important now to support the SGP's election campaign. We call on everyone who refuses to accept glaring social inequality, the destruction of the health and education system, the rise of the AfD and the looming nuclear annihilation of our planet: support the SGP's election campaign! Share this video! Organise meetings in workplaces, schools, universities and neighbourhoods! Build independent rank-and-file action committees! Register as an active supporter and join the SGP!

The fight against war will not be decided in the Berlin state assembly, but in the workplaces, on the streets, in the schools and universities—and it will be decided internationally.

Make the Berlin state election the starting point of an international socialist movement against brutal social cuts, fascism and war!

Become an active supporter of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei!



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact