

“This state is making us destitute”

Socialist Equality Party campaign team fights for socialist perspective against war and social cuts in Eisenach

Our reporters
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Ahead of the state elections taking place on Sunday in the eastern Germany states of Thuringia and Saxony, a team from the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) intervened in Eisenach on Wednesday and spoke to workers, young people and pensioners about a socialist perspective in the fight against war, social devastation and the rise of the far right. At the Opel plant in Eisenach, the SGP team discussed the need to build rank-and-file action committees and join forces with their Stellantis colleagues in the USA to fight in defence of all jobs. The *World Socialist Web Site* will publish a separate report on this.

Opposition to the NATO proxy war in Ukraine against Russia and outrage at the reactionary record of the Ramelow state government (a coalition headed by the Left Party together with the Social Democrats, SPD and Greens) was palpable in Eisenach. Within a few hours, dozens of passers-by stopped to discuss their situation with SGP members.

Older passers-by in particular, many of whom had lived through the Second World War and the immediate post-war period, felt that the SGP’s perspective of uniting the working class internationally against the capitalist warmongers appealed to them. Typical reactions were: “I was a child of the war, and I remember what it was like back then. It must never come to that again.” Or: “I have goose bumps, I feel the same way. I wish you a lot of strength.”

Irmgard, a poor pensioner, spoke out strongly against arms deliveries to Ukraine and against state Prime Minister Bodo Ramelow (Left Party), who supports the war against Ukraine and has recently been in favour of sending German soldiers there. Before German reunification in 1990, she worked at the Ruhla watch factory. At its peak, almost 10,000 worked in the “state-owned company.”

After reunification, the factory was broken up by the Treuhandanstalt, the body set up to privatise and sell off the state owned industries in East Germany. Irmgard, like many others, was pressured into signing a new employment contract with one of the new companies “for 3.40 Deutschmarks an hour in three shifts. After six months, we were all unemployed, then without severance pay because we had signed a new contract.” She then “lived out of the container” for 10 years.

She therefore strongly rejects the biased media coverage of East Germany. “All this talk of the ‘good West’ and the ‘bad East’ is nonsense. We have every reason to moan. This state is making us destitute. It can’t go on like this.” Irmgard also dislikes the former Left Party politician and current leading candidate of the Sarah Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) Katja Wolf, “who I thought a lot of at first”. But as mayor of Eisenach, “she destroyed the social infrastructure”, says Irmgard. “Now she’s leaving the sinking ship.”

Vanessa, a young mother, says: “I’m currently on parental leave and I

have to say that the parental allowance is actually pathetic. For the fact that you still have exactly the same, and in some cases increasing, costs from bringing up children, 65 percent of it is simply not really viable. I’ve really had to turn over every cent in the last few months. Next are the nurseries and school places. I can’t be paying 320 euros a month for a nursery place here in Thuringia—not including the child’s lunch money. That’s pretty hefty. More and more people also don’t know how to pay their electricity and heating bills.”

Vanessa is firmly opposed to German arms deliveries to the Ukrainian military and the rearmament of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces). “I’m afraid that things will soon start to go wrong here too. The fact that the military is travelling around here more and more and is in the skies worries me. The money belongs in our education system, in the nurseries. It belongs in the salaries of people who work in medicine and care. Much more should be done for families. There are a lot of problems in the villages and towns that are simply not being addressed.”

A passer-by, after learning that the SGP is a socialist party fighting for social equality, said: “Social injustice is a big problem. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer.” She herself experienced several years of unemployment in the past and knows how difficult it is to find a reasonably paid job. She is completely undecided as to who she should vote for in the state elections.

During the conversation, it became clear that she, like other passers-by, is influenced by the xenophobic agitation against refugees spread by the media, all state parliamentary parties and the BSW, who repeat the myth that migrants allegedly received more living space and money. Members of the SGP emphasised that the social misery was a result of decades of austerity policies by all the bourgeois parties and horrendous war spending. The attempt to make foreign workers and refugees the scapegoat for social hardship is intended to divide the working class and distract attention from the ruling class’s policies of war and austerity. The passer-by reacted thoughtfully and also took the WSW leaflet “The Sahara Wagenknecht alliance is no alternative to the traffic light and AfD” to address the SGP’s criticism of the BSW.

A pensioner who is involved in the “Grannies against the Right” group asked SGP members with concern why the AfD also receives support from workers, even though it represents opposing social interests. One SGP member replied that the liquidation of the Soviet Union and the former East Germany (GDR) by the Stalinists and the subsequent decades of war and austerity policies, which were driven forward by the SPD, Greens and Left Party in particular, under the banner of “left-wing” politics, had created social despair and political confusion, which was now being exploited by the most right-wing forces. In the state and federal

governments, it was also evident that these parties are not fighting against the right, but on the contrary are implementing the programme of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) themselves.

Several passers-by reacted with particular interest when SGP members explained that the German ruling class is pursuing tangible economic and geostrategic interests by participating in the proxy war in Ukraine and is working to turn the country into an outpost of the European Union and a dependable supplier of raw materials for German and European industry, as well as militarily subjugating Russia itself. SGP members strongly opposed the view that the German elites were participating in the war solely at the behest of the USA.

Just as much interest was displayed in the historical foundations of the SGP and its Trotskyist heritage. “Trotsky! I know him,” said Maxim (name changed by the editors), a war refugee from Ukraine, who approached the SGP book table and pointed to the book “Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the 21st Century” by David North.

Maxim expressed his full support for uniting Ukrainian and Russian workers in the struggle against the war. He nodded as SGP representatives explained why it was necessary to build an international movement against war based on the struggle against Stalinism conducted by the Left Opposition under Trotsky. When SGP members drew his attention to the campaign for the release of the Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk, who was arrested for his opposition to the war in Ukraine, Maxim reacted particularly strongly.

He comes from Donetsk in eastern Ukraine and was very concerned about the danger of a further escalation of the war. The Zelensky government no longer had strong support among the population, he said. He himself had initially reacted positively to the demonstrations on Maidan Square in 2014. A year later, however, it became clear that it was not a revolution—as portrayed in the media—but a right-wing coup.

In particular, the immediate social consequences of the war, such as constant power cuts and high prices, were a heavy burden on the people, he said. He did not support either Zelensky or the Russian Putin regime, as they serve the interests of the oligarchs, he emphasised and reported on the enormous social inequality and corruption of millionaire entrepreneurs in Donetsk who exploit their employees.

The escalating war in Ukraine was on the minds of almost everyone the WWS spoke to in Eisenach. In response to state Premier Ramelow’s demand to send German soldiers to Ukraine, one pensioner declared indignantly: “They’re crazy. I’m furious about what this person is contemplating. I really don’t understand how Ukraine can walk around with its Nazi symbols—and we supply them with weapons.”

She also criticised the devastating situation facing refugee families in Germany: “They are not allowed to work if they are locked up in these shelters. Isn’t that madness? They are more or less sent to concentration camps. What are the young people supposed to do?”

When asked what problems are affecting the people of Thuringia, she said: “The car factories are closing, the suppliers are gone. Look, the infrastructure is collapsing.” The young generation in particular has been hit hard by this, she added.

The facts confirm this. The unemployment rate in Thuringia is currently around six percent. According to data from the Federal Employment Agency in June, the number of long-term unemployed rose by almost 15 percent in the first half of 2024 compared to the previous year. Underemployment has also increased. Thousands of workers were affected by short-time work; in March, this affected 7,400 employees in 300 companies.

As the *Thüringer Allgemeine* reported at the end of July, young people between the ages of 18 and 25 are particularly affected by poverty in Thuringia. At 34.2 percent, the proportion is almost nine percent higher than the national average. The latest 2024 life situation report from the Ministry of Education in Thuringia also shows that the mental health

of young people has “deteriorated significantly” in recent years, with around 45 percent stating they are “often unhappy or depressed.”

One of the report’s most important sources is the Thuringian survey of children and young people conducted by Orbit e.V. in December 2021 and January 2022. The majority of respondents aged between 12 and 27 named “social justice” as the greatest social challenge (57.6 percent). This was followed by climate change (54.9 percent), war/terror (51.1 percent), poverty (50.9 percent), environmental pollution (45.8 percent) and diseases (43.2 percent).

In Eisenach itself, the situation of many families is precarious. According to the Eisenach Living Conditions Report 2018, around 21.4 percent of children under the age of 18 lived in a low-income family with at least one unemployed parent. Social planner Christin Mäder said that “based on the findings from the youth survey, the phenomenon of ‘working poor’ can increasingly be identified in Eisenach.” Children and young people with parents who work in the low-wage sector have to do without certain goods and activities much more frequently.

The state government under Left Party Prime Minister Bodo Ramelow, who has led a coalition with the SPD and Greens since 2014, is responsible for the social and political crisis in Thuringia. Katja Wolf, who has now switched from the Left Party to the BSW, was Lord Mayor of Eisenach from 2012 to 2024.

Three weeks ago, she gave an interview to the broadcaster Jung&Naiv in which she openly admitted she had pushed ahead with social cuts in Eisenach in order to get the city out of debt. “It was quite classic—it’s called a budget protection concept—the accumulation of atrocities: from the cancellation of the lunch subsidy to the increase in parking fees, from the increase in dog tax to the increase in trade tax. These were all measures that were indeed unpleasant but have led to the city being able to function again. And we voluntarily gave up our freedom from the district council—no other German city has done that—because we were at that point: Unfortunately, we can’t afford it.”

Journalist Thilo Jung commented: “The Left Party has saved money everywhere.” Wolf responded succinctly and without batting an eyelid: “Yes.” Cancelling the meal subsidy was “politically incorrect”, but “there was no alternative”. When asked by Jung whether she, as a “left-wing” mayor, had done anything left-wing, she said: distributing the list of atrocities “fairly.” Municipalities in “budget protection measures” would not have “the chance to die in beauty.”

Wolf then tried to incite the poor against the refugees. When asked how many food banks there were in Eisenach, she said that there was only one—and that it now had to provide for more people than before because “the Syrians and Ukrainians” also had a claim to it and “ensure that the queue has become longer.”

With this repulsive rant, Wolf unabashedly confirms that the Left Party and the BSW are anti-working-class parties. Everywhere they (co-)govern at local or state level they push through the harshest cuts in the interests of capitalism. The Left Party has thus not only created the breeding ground for the AfD, it and its spin-off, the BSW, are also increasingly aggressively adopting the fascists’ anti-agitation in order to divide workers.

Leading SGP member, Katja Rippert, made a statement on the market square in Eisenach in which she declared:

“Fascism, war and social devastation can only be fought by mobilising the working class against their cause, capitalism. No problem can be solved without breaking the power of the banks and corporations and putting them under democratic control.

“Such a movement must be international and independent of all bourgeois parties—including the BSW and the Left Party—as well as the trade unions, which have been transformed into representatives of corporate interests.

“The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei and its sister organisations in the International Committee of the Fourth International advocate this perspective. We call on all working people and young people who want to fight against war and the rise of the AfD: Join the socialists, join the SGP!”



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