

Echoes of 1989 in Dresden Mass Action

by Silvia Heinel

Dresden, in the German state of Saxony, was one of many cities in former Communist East Germany that gave rise to the peaceful revolution that ousted the Communist government in 1989. This article was translated from German.

March 12—Anyone who is still constantly hearing the complaint of pessimistic citizens, that “nothing ever changes” and that “Germans never take to the streets,” has not only slept through the fact that almost half the world’s population is on its feet to get rid of this bankrupt world financial system, but has also missed the fact that the principle of the global mass strike has now also asserted itself in Saxony.

On March 10, some 17,000 Saxony teachers, and policemen who were in solidarity with them, gathered in Dresden in front of the Finance Ministry, to demand that the government adhere to the collective bargaining process with the trade unions. This demonstration, like the recent ones in Wisconsin and elsewhere, involved much more than just wage hikes or collective bargaining, however. This became obvious when the Saxon Finance Minister, Georg Unland, went to the microphone to attempt to placate the teachers.

The Bankers’ Man

Unland, since the beginning of the financial crisis, has always put himself on the side of the bankers and financier interests, especially in the case of the Saxon Landesbank (state bank), the first German “bad bank”—a repository for toxic loans and other financial waste—which almost drove the state into bankruptcy in 2007. After the Baden-Württemberg Landesbank had bought the Saxon Landesbank, the Saxon government guaranteed the bank’s losses with EU2.72 billion of taxpayers’ money. The Saxon Finance Minister personally lobbied for an expansion of the guarantee by EU1.8 billion, in order to stuff still more tax

money into the “black hole.”

You can imagine how heated the mood was, when Unland walked onto the stage to address the demonstration. Even greater was the outrage when he showed that he had never intended to be responsive to the concerns of the teachers, while making cynical comments about the negotiations with the union. When he began singing the usual tune, “We had the worst economy crisis ever in Germany in 2009,” the anger of the 17,000 teachers couldn’t be contained. They demonstratively turned their backs on the speaker, while shouts were heard such as, “Yes, you have saved the banks, but not our jobs,” or “You have squandered the money on the state bank.” Otherwise, the demonstrators used whistles, megaphones, and horns, to drown out the discredited speaker.

When the Finance Minister asserted that jobs in the public sector were “crisis-proof,” the demonstrators erupted at this transparent lie. Several thousand teachers began a chant: “Stop! Stop! Stop!” Unland finally left the stage, to the joy of the teachers and their supporters.

This demonstration clearly showed not only that the global mass strike has also arrived in Germany, but it also means that Germany’s tradition of a peaceful revolution in 1989 can be repeated. This time it was not “only” about shutting up the Saxon Finance Minister, but at the next opportunity, it could demand the adoption of a two-tier banking system—the Glass-Steagall standard.

It should be well known to all that today’s prevailing injustice cannot just continue in this way. That was also the message of the Civil Rights Solidarity Movement (BüSo, the LaRouche movement in Germany) to the demonstrating teachers and policemen, to whom several thousand leaflets were distributed, which said: “Egypt Is Everywhere!” and “There Is a Limit to a Tyrant’s Power!”

This demonstration also showed how important it is to place the problems of the teachers in the larger context of the systemic crisis. Because only if all layers of the population and professional groups fight for the reorganization of the financial system, can the two-tiered banking system, in the sense of Franklin Roosevelt’s Glass-Steagall Law, be instituted. Bad debts must be cleaned out of our commercial banks, and we must present the bill to those who, as gamblers, were responsible for the casino economy, namely, Wall Street.