

IYSSE at Berlin's Humboldt University holds final election campaign meeting

By our correspondents
20 January 2016

On Monday, more than 80 students and workers attended the final campaign meeting of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in the student parliament elections at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. Joining representatives of the IYSSE in Germany was Niles Williamson, a representative of the IYSSE in the United States.

To open the meeting, IYSSE spokesperson Christoph Vandreier discussed the rapidly growing threat of war. He said that the return of German militarism found expression in combat missions in Syria, Mali, Afghanistan and several other countries. Amid growing opposition to war within the population, he noted, official political circles were ever more openly embracing police state measures and chauvinism.

“The hysteria around New Year’s Eve in Cologne is a prime example of a dirty smear campaign,” said Vandreier, pointing to the lack of evidence to substantiate media allegations of sexual assaults by hundreds of refugees at Cologne’s central train station on New Year’s Eve. “Despite the lack of evidence, not a single party in the German parliament and not a single major newspaper refused to take part in the hysteria, and all called for a massive build-up of the police.”

The fact that outside of the IYSSE and the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party—PSG) there is no political movement opposed to the drive to war despite the widespread opposition in the population, was, he said, to be explained by the transformation of the leaders of the former anti-war movement into warmongers. High-ranking members of the Left Party agitate against refugees, he pointed out, while the Greens have become the most explicit supporters of war.

These developments contain fundamental lessons, said Vandreier. “They show that one cannot fight against war without first addressing its roots in the capitalist system.”

Glaring social inequality and the contradiction between

global production and the nation-state system fuel imperialist conflicts and are leading toward a third world war, he explained. We answer the outbreak of national conflicts and the crisis of the European Union with the “international unity of workers,” said Vandreier. A socialist perspective is required.

Niles Williamson, a member of the IYSSE in the United States, who came to Berlin to take part in the meeting, spoke on the significance of the work at Humboldt University. “Students and workers all over the world will see an IYSSE victory in the student parliament elections as a clear message against the ruling elite’s lust for war.”

The resurgence of militarism was, of course, not limited to Germany, Williamson stressed. “The government of the United States is the centre of world imperialism and remains the leading supplier of violence in today’s world.” Williamson addressed in detail the wars against Iraq, Libya and Syria and the threat of war with Russia. Drone assassinations, torture and kidnappings are all in a day’s work for the American military, he said.

“The threat of American imperialism and the danger that its pursuit of hegemony could lead to a Third World War is very real,” Williams said. “But there is a strong opposing force, and that is the American working class.” The last 15 years of war and social cuts have not gone unnoticed by workers, and there is widespread opposition to capitalism.

Williamson strikingly described how basic social services have been destroyed and the rights of workers undermined. “No one sees the United States as the land of opportunity anymore, but as the land of foreclosures, utility shut-offs and the dismantling of public education.”

There are strong indications that workers are entering into ferocious class struggles, Williamson continued. The IYSSE and the Socialist Equality Party won considerable support last year among autoworkers in their fight against the drive to slash wages and benefits by the United Auto

Workers union and the US automakers. Polls have shown that a majority of Americans under the age of 29 see socialism in a more positive light than capitalism.

Following Williamson's remarks, Sven Wurm, the lead candidate of the IYSSE at Humboldt University, spoke. "We have demonstrated," he said, "that here at Humboldt University, professors work out the ideological narrative for a more aggressive foreign policy, for new wars, for German world power status and for a strong state, authoritarian forms of rule and, finally, dictatorship." Humboldt University professors Herfried Münkler and Jorg Baberowski have played a central role in this process, he pointed out.

Münkler has spoken openly in favour of rewriting history in order to implement a new aggressive German foreign policy. He himself declared that Germany would have to become the taskmaster of Europe.

Baberowski defends the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte and relativizes the Nazis' war crimes. Over the past week he has repeatedly appeared in the media to rail against refugees. He openly calls for the building of an extreme right-wing party.

Wurm said that when one looks at the developments at Humboldt University and the media campaign in Cologne, one sees how the old questions of xenophobia and dictatorship are resurfacing. It is worth noting, he added, that every party in the German political establishment supports these policies and that the IYSSE is the only force at the university that has opposed the drive to war and the smear campaign against refugees.

"War will not be stopped by a student parliament election," said Wurm, "but our success is an important indicator that there is an opposition to these developments." At Humboldt University, which over the course of the 20th Century played a significant role in the preparation of two world wars, this is extremely important. "The student parliament election is not the end of a campaign, but the beginning of an anti-war movement," Wurm concluded.

In the discussion that followed, a history student who had learned about the IYSSE during the campaign spoke up. "I want to support a vote for the IYSSE," she said. She had read about a ban on foreigners in swimming pools in the city Bornheim and was shocked at such developments. Hostility toward foreigners was being stirred up, she said. With the delivery of weapons and combat missions, Germany was contributing to the misery of people who are being turned into refugees.

Other listeners expressed thanks for the contributions

and the work of the IYSSE at Humboldt University. Many wanted to know more about what the IYSSE meant by a socialist perspective and why the organization placed such importance on basing the fight against war on the working class. A supporter also asked what the IYSSE hoped to accomplish in the student parliament.

In his answer, Vandreier stressed that the perverse growth of inequality and the global drive to war could be understood only with a class analysis of society. A socialist perspective meant that workers had to intervene independently in the political situation and reorganize the economy to meet human needs. The theoretical questions the IYSSE was fighting out at Humboldt had great significance for this task.

Katja, who is running as a candidate for the IYSSE and moderated the evening's discussion, added that socialism had nothing in common with Stalinism, which had come to prevail in the Soviet Union. "Stalinism was the hostile reaction of the ruling bureaucracy to the October Revolution and not its continuation," she said. Katja also underscored the significance of the elections. "The other groups running in the elections are trying to prevent the student parliament from becoming an instrument of students in the fight against the transformation of the university into an ideological centre for war," she said.

The student parliament elections at Humboldt University are currently underway and will conclude on Wednesday, January 20 at 6 pm.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>