

ICFI Secretary Peter Schwarz speaks in London on Brexit referendum

By our reporter
16 June 2016

Peter Schwarz, Secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and a leading member of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party—PSG), spoke in London Tuesday night on the subject of “socialism versus left nationalism.”

The meeting was one in a series held by the Socialist Equality Party (UK) as part of its campaign for an active boycott of the referendum on UK membership of the European Union (EU) on June 23.

Schwarz’s presentation was listened to attentively by an audience of students, workers and retirees. The meeting was live-streamed over the internet, with listeners from India, Sri Lanka, America and various countries in Europe including Poland, Germany and France.

Opening the meeting, Chris Marsden, SEP National Secretary, explained that both the official camps in the referendum campaign were headed by right-wing Tories, committed to austerity, militarism and nationalism. He attacked those in the pseudo-left who claimed that either one of these camps would provide a progressive way forward for workers and youth—whether through a supposedly reformed EU or a Leave vote leading to the downfall of the Conservative government and the coming to power of Labour’s Jeremy Corbyn to implement a “socialist” agenda. Each side was setting out deliberately to stir up nationalism and xenophobia, Marsden explained, in a conscious effort to divert social antagonisms and break up the emerging threat of a unified class struggle across national borders.

In his remarks, Schwarz explained that the referendum “marks a major political watershed not only for Britain but for Europe as a whole.”

The implications of a Leave vote by the

second-largest economy in Europe, he said, were incalculable. “A Brexit [British exit] would speed up an international trend—the growth of economic nationalism, the break-up of the global economy into trade blocks, and the development of currency and trade wars.”

However, Brexit would not be the cause of these developments, but was itself a manifestation of underlying tendencies bound up with the breakdown of the capitalist profit system, which, just as in the 1930s, was the driving force for a new world war.

Schwarz reviewed the panicked response of the European bourgeoisie to this development. In particular, he drew attention to the German press, including *Der Spiegel*, whose latest magazine—written in English and German—was headlined “Please don’t go.”

The editorial stated that withdrawal would accelerate the disintegration of Europe into hostile and competing national states, warning that the referendum was “about nothing less than the future of the peace project started in 1946 by erstwhile enemy nations on a devastated continent...”

Setting out its broader implications, it continued, “Britain is a bridge between Europe and the US. If Britain leaves the EU on this side of the Atlantic while Donald Trump becomes president on the other, then seemingly permanent alliances will wobble.”

In a remarkable passage, it stated, “Following Brexit, Germany would lose an important ally and, as a large central power on the continent, it would be definitively condemned to take on the leadership role it never wanted.”

Though expressed politely, this must be read as a threat by the German bourgeoisie, Schwarz said, which had twice sought to conquer Europe by military force.

A Remain vote would not prevent these processes. While the repercussions might be less immediate, they would be no less dramatic. “The referendum will accelerate all the tendencies which have made the European Union the most hated institution on the continent,” he said, continuing and intensifying its role as the driving force of social attacks and deregulation, speeding up the transformation of EU into a police state and a military fortress. Indeed, the few benefits that the EU brought—the elimination of border controls, the possibility of working and studying in the country of one’s choice, a guarantee of certain democratic rights—are being done away with in the name of combating terrorism and deterring refugees.

Within this context, Schwarz dealt with the politically criminal role of the pseudo-left in lining up behind one or another bourgeois camp in the referendum. In particular, he dealt with the role of those such as George Galloway and the Socialist Workers Party who were promoting a Leave vote as a “progressive” and even left-wing alternative to austerity and militarism.

Schwarz noted their assertion that a Leave vote would lead to the replacement of Prime Minister David Cameron by the leading euros-sceptic Boris Johnson, deepening divisions in the Tory party and creating the basis for the fall of the government and its replacement by a Corbyn-led Labour government. This type of criminal political opportunism based on narrow, nationalist and pragmatic calculations had enormous implications, he warned. “The struggle for socialism cannot be delegated to factions of the bourgeoisie,” he said. “An independent political movement of the working class cannot be replaced by tactical manoeuvres and playing hide-and-seek with right-wing factions of ruling class.”

This was the lessons of the German workers’ movement, Schwarz explained. The Left Leave espousal of “After Boris, Corbyn” brought to mind the slogan of the German Communist Party (KPD) in the 1930s, “After Hitler, then us.”

The disastrous consequences of the KPD’s position, which was the consequence of the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy’s rejection of world socialist revolution in favour of building “socialism in one country”, led to Hitler’s coming to power without a shot being fired and to world war and the Holocaust.

The transcript of Schwarz’s remarks will be made

available soon. His presentation was followed by a lively question and answer session, including what conditions are necessary for revolution in Britain; the relationship between objective conditions and the subjective role of revolutionary political leadership and how to ensure against a betrayal of workers aspirations similar to that carried out by the Syriza government in Greece.

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>