

WSWS/SEP London meeting: “The working class needs its own international strategy”

Our correspondent
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On Sunday June 22, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) of Britain held a public meeting in London to discuss the lessons of the Iraq war and the tasks of the European working class.

Opening his remarks, Peter Schwarz, member of the WSWS Editorial Board and of the executive of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) of Germany, stressed that the Iraq war constituted a turning point in international politics.

“The basis of the old political mechanisms and institutions of the postwar period has been stripped away by the new direction of American foreign policy,” Schwarz said. “This applies not only to international relations, but to national conditions as well. There is barely a social or political structure in any country that is not affected by this.”

This was illustrated by recent events in France where millions of workers went on strike and participated in demonstrations against the pension reform plan of the right-wing government of Jean-Pierre Raffarin.

“There were two remarkable aspects of this movement,” Schwarz said. “Its determination, size and tenacity—the government, despite its large majority in parliament, was largely isolated—and the complete absence of political perspective and leadership, that would have been indispensable to make the movement a success. All political tendencies of the left and all trade unions were either openly opposing the movement, sabotaging it or leading it into a dead end. In the end, the workers got nothing.”

After detailing the role played by the trade unions, the Socialist and Communist parties, and the parties of the radical left, Schwarz concluded:

“A number of lessons must be drawn from the recent French experience. The first is that the old forms of struggle and the old reformist parties and trade unions

have pretty much exhausted themselves. The class struggle, that has taken a predominantly trade union form over the last 50 years, must now take a political form (i.e., it must directly challenge the rule of the bourgeoisie and its control over society).

“The second is that there exists not a single political or social organisation in France that is ready to pose this task, let alone to take responsibility for it. But there is absolutely no way to defend the pensions or any other social achievement without challenging the rule of the bourgeoisie and installing a government that defends the interests of the working class. This is not an easy task, nor can it be achieved overnight. It demands the building of a new independent political party. Without posing this question openly, it can never be resolved.

“Such a party—this is the third conclusion—needs a strategy that is fundamentally different from the existing political organisations. The idea that the issue of pensions can be resolved within the borders of France is absurd. Similar attacks are being carried out all over Europe and the world. French workers are not just facing Raffarin and Chirac; behind them are the employers’ association Medef, the European Union and international finance capital. Even if Raffarin were to retreat, France would immediately be sanctioned by the international markets.

“The globalisation of production has undermined the policy of concessions and class compromise over a long period. The Iraq war and the intense conflict between Europe and America have now tremendously accelerated this process. US imperialism is seeking to remodel the entire world economy on the basis of the most naked and ruthless forms of the free market.

“The French and German governments have capitulated to the US war drive. They have belatedly

sanctioned the Iraq war and try now to compete with America: economically by introducing American social conditions into Europe, militarily by building their own capacities for colonial intervention.

“Under these conditions, the defence of pensions and social achievements coincides with the struggle against imperialism and war. It is obvious that the working class cannot confront these dangers by withdrawing into the national nutshell. It needs its own international strategy.

“A central element of this strategy is the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe. The Single Market, the European Union and the euro single currency have economically integrated the continent and removed many of its internal borders. But the European bourgeoisie is neither able to harmoniously unite the continent, nor to respond to the US challenge.

“We aim at building a united Europe on the basis of equality, democracy and socialism. We are for the social and political equality of all people—natives and immigrants, regardless of nationality, colour or religion. We are for the reorganisation of economic life on a socialist basis.

“A socialist Europe would be a powerful counterweight to US imperialism. Our answer to war is not disarmament, but the mobilisation of the international working class against US imperialism. This is not anti-Americanism. In fact, such a policy would be a powerful point of attraction for the US working class. We want to assist American workers in the project of ‘regime-change’ in Washington.”

A lively discussion followed on the strike movement in France and the current efforts by the British press and the Blair Labour government to scapegoat asylum-seekers for the growing social crisis.

See accompanying remarks to the meeting by Chris Marsden, WSWs Editorial Board member and national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Britain.



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