

Germany: Essen meeting discusses establishing International Students for Social Equality

A movement against war must be a movement against capitalism

Our reporter
14 May 2007

A promising meeting was held to discuss establishing a branch of the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) last week in the German city of Essen. A dozen students at the local university discussed the programmatic basis of the ISSE with members of the International Committee the Fourth International (ICFI).

The meeting was introduced by Parwini Zora, a member of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party, PSG), the German section of the ICFI, who also writes regularly for the *World Socialist Web Site*. She is studying languages at Essen University.

Zora reported the proceedings of the ISSE Emergency Conference held in the US on the fourth anniversary of the Iraq war, and in which she had participated as a delegate. "Altogether some 150 people came to the conference, mostly from the USA and Canada as well as from all over the world, to develop a political programme for the ISSE."

When the Iraq war began in March 2003, millions demonstrated against it around the globe, Zora said. "One could say it was the largest international political mobilization in history. But the war continued unabated and has, in the meantime, cost the lives of well over half a million, including over 3,300 American soldiers."

The preparations for war against Iran are also continuing in the background and have led to increasing tensions between the great powers. As at the beginning of the First and Second World Wars, the struggle for sources of raw materials and energy has become the centre of imperialist rivalries and antagonisms.

The most important question that stood at the centre of the discussion at the conference in the US was the following, reported Zora: "If war is a product of the capitalist system, then war cannot be ended other than through the abolition of capitalism. A movement against war must be a movement against capitalism." She described in detail the objective economic and political developments that stand behind the outbreak of American militarism.

Zora also dealt with the rise of social inequality throughout the world. "For approximately three decades, social inequality and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a very small layer of the population have grown rapidly." On a world level the income of the richest one percent of the world population is as high as that of the lowest ten percent. The combined fortunes of the three richest people are higher than the poorest 600 million.

"The policy of militarism and increasing social inequality leads inevitably to social explosions", she said, quoting from the resolution

of the ISSE conference in the US, "and the maintenance of this policy in the face of mounting international opposition requires the abolition of democratic forms of rule" In the final analysis, "social inequality and militarism are incompatible with democracy."

There are explosive consequences when a movement against war and growing social inequality becomes consciously linked to a struggle against the foundations of the capitalist system, Zora concluded. "Students and young people need a new political orientation. They should not seek to orient themselves towards so-called leftwing organizations and parties like Attac, the Election Alternative or the Left Party [in Germany], which try in one form or another to channel their protests in a way that does not threaten the ruling establishment."

Dietmar Henning addressed this point more thoroughly in his introductory remarks. Henning is also member of the PSG and writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*.

He dealt with the experiences of working people with various "left" organizations in countries such as France and Italy.

In the recent presidential elections in France, the organizations of the so-called extreme left, which falsely claim to be Trotskyist, called for a vote for the candidate of the Socialist Party, Ségolène Royal. They said that in comparison to Sarkozy this represented the lesser evil and that Royal could be forced to carry out other policies through protests and demonstrations.

"That is absolutely wrong", said Henning. "The differences between Royal and Sarkozy are tactical and not of a principled nature. Moreover, Sarkozy himself is the product of the policy of the lesser evil." Five years ago, the defeat of Socialist Party candidate Lionel Jospin led to many of the radicals calling for a vote for Jacques Chirac in order to stop the ultra-right Jean-Marie Le Pen—as they claimed at that time. The result of this policy was to strengthen Chirac, who had received less than 20 percent of the vote in the first round. Chirac then used the favourable circumstances in order to unite the splintered rightwing into the UMP, which then spawned Sarkozy.

"In Italy, the rightward development of the lefts has progressed even further", said Henning. There, Rifondazione Comunista (Refounded Communism), the model for the French radical left, has supported bourgeois governments for years, arguing that this was the only way to stop the right wing associated with Silvio Berlusconi and the neo-fascist Gianfranco Fini. Today, Rifondazione, which grew as a result

of the anti-Iraq war demonstrations that they mainly organised, is part of the Prodi government. Rifondazione agrees to cuts in social spending and to international military missions by the Italian army and attacks all those who oppose these policies - and all in the name of the "fight against the right wing".

"The politics of Rifondazione, in which there are also members of organizations that claim to be Trotskyist", Henning continued, "have disarmed the working class politically. They have created the conditions under which Silvio Berlusconi, who had been driven out of twice already and is confronting a possible prison term, has a good chance of gaining power for a third time. And Fini is now considered to be the rising star of Italian politics."

This is the result of the politics of the so-called left, Henning concluded, and in this regard made a warning about the "Linke.SDS" (Sozialistisch-Demokratischer Studierendenverband—Democratic Socialist Students Society), the new university students' federation of the Left Party-Party of Democratic Socialism.

Henning quoted from the draft programme of this new university federation: "We see ourselves being connected with the struggles of social movements like the trade unions, the unemployed, the peace and the anti-globalization movement, anti-fascist and emancipatory groups. The social balance of power can only be shifted together with these extra-parliamentary protagonists."

"As a students' federation we are a component of the youth federation that will be established by the Left Party. This organizational and political solidarity will be expressed through close co-operation and mutual support."

Dietmar Henning stressed, "I can only sound a warning about this. The 'extra-parliamentary protagonists' mentioned above—the trade unions, Attac, etc.—just like the 'parliamentary protagonists' in the form of the Left Party, are not the solution to the problem, but are the main obstacles to overcoming them."

It was particularly these questions that a lively discussion then developed lasting over two and a half hours.

One student said that although he did not support the Left Party, he did not regard it as the main obstacle. "Rather, it is to be welcomed if the Left Party speaks out against welfare cuts." And if they then receive votes in the elections, this is really an expression of the fact that there is much opposition in the population against welfare cuts. A vote for the Left Party is still better than one for the SPD or CDU.

Henning answered that it was precisely the experience with the Berlin city legislature that shows that a vote for the Left Party does not lead to welfare cuts being halted. "The Left Party in city hall acts no differently to the CDU and SPD. On the contrary, in Berlin it has pushed through massive cuts against the general population and city employees. It has to answer for the destruction of 15,000 public service jobs. Berlin has withdrawn from the local government employers' association in order to get out of the current contract and impose lower wages". The Left Party has drastically increased fees for child care and so on.

Moreover, in Berlin - and in Dresden-it has sold off public housing by the tens of thousands to investors and speculators.

"The policy of the Left Party in Berlin has only ensured further confusion and frustration and thus has strengthened the rightwing, which can profit from this development", Henning said.

In the discussion, the politics of other organizations which call themselves left wing or even revolutionary was then raised. These groups work in and around the Left Party and claim that with pressure from below this organization could be forced to the left to fight

against neo-liberalism and welfare cuts.

"We reject such a view", Henning stressed. "Over the past two decades, the standard of living for working people has been massively attacked and lowered around the world-through lowering wages, the destruction of jobs, welfare cuts, deregulation and the introduction of cheap wage labour." This is an international phenomenon and has happened regardless whether conservative, liberal or "left" parties are in government.

This alone shows that the deeper causes are not down to the will of individual governments, parties or politicians, but lie in the capitalist system, which is no longer capable of guaranteeing conditions of even relative peace, democracy and social equilibrium today. The Left Party has proved this with the policies it has carried through in practice in the Berlin city and Mecklenburg Western Pomerania state legislatures.

If organizations try to explain that capitalism can be improved socially by putting pressure on the ruling elite, this only serves those in power in the long run.

The discussion regarding the trade unions followed a similar pattern. Henning and other PSG members present explained the lessons of the industrial disputes at auto makers Opel in October 2004, which many of the students present had followed with interest. The IG Metall trade union and its members of the Works Council had sold out the strike, which had erupted against their will. The Opel management was able to implement all its demands and is now preparing the next round of job cuts. The trade unions are moribund as far as the working class is concerned. Anyone who says they must be "won back" or be pushed to the left is a charlatan.

Both Zora and Henning dealt with the history of the disputes over these questions with other organizations, leading many of the students to express an interest in finding out more about Leon Trotsky and his politics, as well as about the history the Fourth International. Some had read Trotsky's writings, while others had only vaguely heard of him. Zora, Henning and other PSG members spent time explaining the significance of Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism and to found the Fourth International.

At the end of the meeting an agreement was reached to meet again within the following weeks.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact