

Lively discussions at SEP European election meetings in North West England

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party held two well-attended eve of poll meetings in Liverpool and Manchester in the run-up to elections to the European Parliament.

Workers and young people listened attentively to the speakers. The SEP was proud to introduce Johannes Stern of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party) of Germany. The SEP and PSG stood on a common manifesto for the elections, held Thursday in Britain and Sunday elsewhere in Europe.

Stern explained that the decision taken by the PSG and SEP to turn the “European elections into a referendum against war are highlighted by developments every day.”

The seriousness of the situation provoked by the US and the European Union in Ukraine had been underscored the statements of former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt, he said.

“In an interview with the *Bild* newspaper, he warned that, as in 1914, Europe was standing on the edge of the abyss.” Though Schmidt said he did not want “to speak too soon about a third world war,” Stern went on, he had said that “the danger that the situation could escalate as in August 1914 is growing daily.”

“And as in 1914 the drive to war finds a particularly sharp expression in Germany. As we speak the German army is conducting its largest military exercises in decades. The operation, named ‘Jawtex’ (Joint Air Warfare Tactical Exercise) involves around 4,500 soldiers from 12 countries, including Germany, France, the US, Italy, Slovenia, Greece, Turkey, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland and Finland. The whole character of the maneuver shows that the German army and its Western allies are once again preparing for a major war with Russia.”

Stern cited the current issue of the German weekly

Der Spiegel, which is quoting drafts of documents prepared for the NATO summit in Brussels next month. “The basic message is: NATO is regarding Russia as an enemy and is ‘reworking and updating its defense plans,’ i.e., is working out war plans against Russia. The article quotes various German politicians and officials backing these plans. Also German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen declared in an interview that the Bundeswehr should participate earlier and play a more prominent role in international missions.

“German politicians and media are on a daily basis spreading vicious propaganda and calls for war,” Stern explained. “They are agitating against the majority of the population which is deeply opposed to war. They are calling for an end to German pacifism and demanding remilitarization of Germany.”

The Ukraine crisis was deliberately provoked by the Western powers to pursue longstanding geopolitical interests, he went on. This shift in foreign policy had been carefully prepared for more than a year, involving 50 leading politicians, journalists, academics and military and business figures in a project organized by the government-aligned Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik and the Washington-based think tank German Marshall Fund.

They produced a strategy paper, entitled, “New power, new responsibility: Elements of a German foreign and security policy for a changing world,” which reads as a blueprint for the policies that are now being implemented in practice. “With the document, the German bourgeoisie is returning to militarist, great power politics following two world wars and horrific crimes.”

The Greens and the Left Party had fully signed on to this. Left Party foreign policy spokesman Stefan Liebich had participated in working out the strategy

paper, Stern said.

“The First World War was ended by the October Revolution and the conquest of power by the Bolshevik party under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky. Because of the betrayals of Social-Democracy and Stalinism the extension of the October Revolution was halted and fascism and world war returned.

“This time the working class cannot allow another world war to start,” Stern concluded. “Revolution has to come first! The historical task of our movement is to prepare the working class for this greatest task.”

Julie Hyland, Assistant National Secretary of the SEP, said she was very pleased to be speaking alongside a German comrade, especially as one “particularly foul feature of these elections is the concerted drive in every country to whip up national and racial divisions. This is by no means confined to the overt right wing or fascistic tendencies—such as the United Kingdom Independence Party here or the National Front in France. It is a feature of all the major parties and the media. Its objective is to silence social opposition to austerity and war.”

The European Union is a tool of big business and imperialist warmongering, she continued. This can be seen clearly in Ukraine where it had lined up behind Washington to help install a government of fascists.

“The British government is up to its neck” in these intrigues, she said. Unlike in Germany, where the warmongering was vocal, the situation in the UK was that Ukraine barely features in the news.

“Neither the government, Labour nor the media want any discussion on what is happening. They got their fingers burned over Syria and their plans to intervene militarily... As we said at the time, the one lesson they would draw from the parliamentary vote over Syria is that never again will they let public opinion interfere with their plans. And so they try to conceal what they are now up to, alternatively churning out anti-Russia propaganda while trying to lull people into a false sense of security.”

Rising social tensions were a major factor in the war preparations, Hyland said. “The ruling class sees war as a means to divert the anger of the masses against austerity, to overcome deep-rooted popular opposition to militarism and to build up the state apparatus in preparation for future class struggles.”

Hyland reviewed the ruinous consequences of

European Union austerity measures in countries such as Greece, where GDP has fallen by 29 percent since 2008, and wages by 23 percent. She contrasted this with the vast increase in wealth accrued by a tiny elite as exposed in the *Sunday Times* Rich List. The wealth of Britain’s richest 1,000 people has doubled since 2008, she explained.

“This is an international phenomenon—one of rule by a global plutocracy. The term, which means a society ruled by a tiny minority of the wealthiest people, was first coined in the 1700s and those are the conditions to which the world has returned.”

“The interests of literally a few hundred people dictate everything,” she said. “The plutocracy demands and governments obey.”

“As we state in our election manifesto, ‘There is no peaceful or easy way out of this crisis. No reformist palliatives will suffice. Only the mobilisation of the international working class to overthrow capitalism can provide a way forward’.”

Both meetings saw lively questions and discussion on the two contributions, which continued after they had been formally closed.



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