

Why does the German ruling elite want war? A well-attended meeting in Frankfurt

Our reporters

15 October 2014

“Why do the German elites want war? The historical and political reasons for the renewed drive for world power” was the title of a well-attended public meeting on Saturday evening at Haus Gallus in Frankfurt. Further meetings on the same topic will take place in the coming days in Bochum and Berlin.

The meeting in Frankfurt was called by the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party, PSG) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). It is part of a campaign against the revival of German militarism.

The PSG and IYSSE campaigned for the meeting with placards and hundreds of flyers at universities, technical colleges, in the local district of Frankfurt, at the Opel plant in Rüsselsheim, and at the Frankfurt book fair. Hundreds of copies of the PSG statement “The Return of German Militarism” were sold.

The campaign met with broad interest. At transport stops on streets, spontaneous discussions developed in response to the placards for the meeting, which contained a short text about the growing danger of war. Over 40 participants ultimately came to the meeting at Haus Gallus. The meeting room was full to capacity.

Parallels to First World War

Peter Schwarz, member of the World Socialist Web Site international editorial board, began his contribution with a look back at World War I, which began one hundred years ago.

The great powers at the time had not, as has often been claimed, slid or sleepwalked into the war unconsciously or against their will, Schwarz said. “There were worked-out war plans like the Schlieffen Plan, formulated war goals like the September programme of then-German chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, and intensive war propaganda.” Schwarz went on to deal with the parallels with today.

A year ago, in his speech on German unity day, President Joachim Gauck announced that Germany once again had to strive for the position of a world power. It had to “play a role in Europe and the world that actually corresponded to its size and influence” and required an active and militarist foreign and security policy.

One year later, this thesis guided Germany’s foreign policy, continued Schwarz. “In the two major international conflicts, in Ukraine and the Middle East, Berlin is playing an active political and military role,” said Schwarz.

With the attempt to draw Ukraine into its sphere of influence, German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier was drawing directly on the politics of Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg and Hitler’s foreign minister, Ribbentrop. “While the first and second world wars were about laying the basis for Germany’s rise to a world power through the domination of central Europe, Berlin is pursuing the same goal today with its attempts to integrate Ukraine into a European

Union (EU) dominated by Germany.”

Schwarz warned that the confrontation with Russia, systematically encouraged by Berlin and Washington, contained within it the danger of a nuclear war.

He said that on the development towards war in the Middle East, in contrast to the 2003 Iraq war and the Libya war of 2011, the German government was determined to be there. “With the supply of weapons to the Kurdish Peshmerga, they have made their first intervention in the scramble for the resource-rich region.”

The aggressive war policy in Ukraine and the Middle East was only the beginning, Schwarz continued. “On Thursday, SPD [Social Democrat] chairman and economy minister Sigmar Gabriel held a speech outlining the principles of Germany’s arms export policy, which culminated in the demand: ‘foreign and security policy must become the starting point and goal of a strategy for Germany’s arms policy.’ ”

Gabriel intended to place the arms industry, which he viewed as a branch of the national interest, at the disposal of foreign policy and militarism, and to this end, “newly organise the deeply divided European defence market and strengthen Europe’s industrial basis for defence technology.” The last German politician to pursue this goal was Adolf Hitler, said Schwarz.

An important component of the return of German imperialism, as in 1914, was the co-option of the media and political parties, and the intimidation and suppression of all opponents of war, Schwarz continued. Militarism could not tolerate any opposition and was inseparable from dictatorial measures domestically.

He described the transformation of the daily news programmes *Tagesthemen* and *Heute Journal* into “evening propaganda shows.” The foreign ministry published a special website where the demand has been raised that it is “Germany’s destiny to lead Europe in order to lead the world.” Journalists with close ties to transatlantic think tanks rail tirelessly against Russia.

Schwarz described the attempt by the Humboldt University (HU) in Berlin to demand that an anti-war meeting held by the IYSSE there adhere to certain conditions in its content as a particularly crass example of censorship. HU had only authorised the use of the meeting room on the condition that “prior to, during and after the meeting,” no member of the university be “smeared” or “insulted,” as had allegedly happened at an IYSSE meeting in July.

The letter went on, “Such forms of conflict contradict the university’s fundamental academic regulations which insist that conflicts are resolved exclusively scientifically. Violations of this fundamental principle will not be tolerated by university management.”

Schwarz noted that the IYSSE had never “smeared” or “insulted” members of the university, but had certainly sharply criticised and rejected the right-wing political standpoint publicly held by members of the university. The chair of the department of Eastern European history, Jörg Baberowski, declared that “Hitler was not evil.” When the IYSSE rejected this, the university described it as a “violation of the scientific discourse.” This was nothing more than censorship, and the IYSSE would never accept it.

Why the drive to war once again?

In the second part of his speech, Schwarz dealt with the question raised in the meeting’s title, “Why do the German elites want war once again?”

“Wars, like revolutions, have deep roots,” he said. “They are not simply the result of the intentions or mistakes of politicians. The danger of a new world war arises out of the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system, the contradiction between globalisation of the economy and its division into antagonistic nation states, which form the basis for the private ownership of the means of production.”

The First World War was already an imperialist war, Schwarz noted. “The older imperialist powers of Britain and France and the younger imperialist Germany and the United States fought for the redivision of the world. Germany pursued this extremely aggressively, because it had arisen late and had an especially dynamic economy at its disposal, which urgently required raw materials and sales markets.

Germany lost the war and tried a second time to strive for world power. “This time it required Hitler. He did not take over power on 31 January 1933, but was ‘handed it’ by the elites in business, the general staff, the state and the bourgeois parties. They required his Nazi movement to destroy the workers’ movement and to direct society as a whole towards the preparation for war.”

Ultimately, this had only been possible because the leaders of the workers, the SPD and the Stalinist-dominated Communist Party, had failed, Schwarz added. “But that is not the topic of this lecture.”

The old issues re-emerge

Germany had also lost the Second World War, Schwarz continued. But the problems that led to the war were not resolved. “The post-war period was only a pause for breath.” With the reunification of Germany, the old problems had re-emerged.

In the 1990s, Germany had tried once again to rise to become a great power at the head of the EU. But at the beginning of the twenty-first century and particularly in the aftermath of the global financial crash of 2008, the EU had fallen into deepening crisis. It was riven by social contradictions and resembled a powder keg.

Concluding, Schwarz said, “The revival of militarism is the ruling elite’s answer to the explosive social tensions, the intensifying economic crisis and the deepening conflicts between the European powers. It serves the purpose of the conquering of new spheres of influence, of the raw materials and sales markets on which the German export economy is heavily dependent. It is aimed at avoiding a social explosion by diverting the social tensions towards an external enemy, and it aims at the militarisation of the entire society, the expansion of state surveillance and the apparatus of repression, the suppression of opposition and the co-option of the media.”

All parliamentary parties were firmly behind the return of German militarism. The SPD and the Greens were among the most strident proponents of war. “The Left Party has also been fully integrated with the course to war. Only a few days before this meeting, 14 leading Left Party members called for the massive expansion of military

action in Syria and Iraq, including the deployment of ground forces.”

“The same forces that are driving the ruling elite to war are also creating the objective preconditions for the development of the socialist revolution,” Schwarz concluded. The PSG based the struggle against war, politically, theoretically and organisationally, on the working class. “As an international class, it is the only force capable of preventing a third world war. Its interests bring it into conflict with the capitalist system.”

But the socialist revolution was not an automatic process. It depends on the building of a new revolutionary party in the working class. The PSG fights for the development of the consciousness of the working class. The party combats the falsehoods and propaganda lies of the media, and campaigns against nationalism and chauvinism for the international unification of the working class.

Lively discussion

A lively discussion developed after the speech. There were several questions on different aspects of the talk.

A participant felt provoked by the PSG’s socialist perspective and orientation to the working class. He asked at the beginning what the PSG suggested as a concrete solution to the problem of the Islamic State. He promoted an intervention by the German army, and claimed that the PSG’s politics meant that, “we do nothing against the concrete danger of radical islamism.” The idea of a revolutionary party of the working class was described by him as an “idealised pipe dream.”

Many participants spoke in opposition to this view, including the speaker himself. Schwarz asked, who could still remember how in 2003 the Iraq war began and in 2011 the Libyan war?

At that time, fabricated and dishonest reports about the horrific crimes of Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi were propagated by the media to justify imperialist wars that cost the lives of hundreds of thousands. “Whoever still believes after this that German or American troops intervene in the Middle East to help Yazidis, Kurds or other minorities is deceiving themselves.”

Islamic State had been built up with hundreds of millions of dollars by the United States and its allies. “Even US vice president Joe Biden recently admitted this. Now, it is being used to justify a new imperialist war to bring about regime change in Syria, isolate Iran and secure the imperialist domination of the region.”

The accusation that the PSG had no concrete solution to the problems in the Middle East was rejected by Schwarz. “We struggle concretely for the unification of the working class and mobilise it against war, while you concretely support the war propaganda of the imperialist powers and want to prevent the working class from opposing militarism.”

“The coming period will be characterised by enormous convulsions,” Schwarz concluded. “There are millions of people who will not accept a new war. They have no trust left in the established parties. But to struggle against war, they have to learn the lessons of history.”

The applause of those present and the successful collection for the PSG signalled overwhelming support at the end of the evening.



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