

Why do the German elites want war?

SEP meeting and discussion in Stuttgart

Our correspondents
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Last Saturday the Socialist Equality Party (PSG) held a meeting in the city of Stuttgart. Peter Schwarz, editor of the German language edition of the *World Socialist Web Site* and a member of the executive of the PSG, gave a presentation entitled, "Why do the German elites want war? The historical and political reasons for the renewed bid for world power."

As he had at recent meetings in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Bochum, Schwarz explained that a watershed in the turn towards war came with an October 3, 2013 speech by President Joachim Gauck, in which he demanded that Germany once again play a role "in Europe and the world".

Schwarz explained how German militarism was being advanced behind the backs of the people. The government, the media and all political parties—including the Left Party—expressly support the revival of German militarism in spite of popular hostility.

"The country where the new course was put into practice was Ukraine," Schwarz stated. He described how the former German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, together with the US diplomat Victoria Nuland and EU Foreign Policy Representative Baroness Ashton, intervened directly in the activities of the "Euro-Maidan" at the end of 2013, and then prepared the coup against Ukrainian president Victor Yanukovych, which was spearheaded by the fascist Right Sector. Since then the German Government has backed the Poroshenko government and helped coordinate new NATO deployments at the Russian border.

"Why do the German elites once again want war?" Schwarz asked. He then explained that with its intervention in Ukraine, the German bourgeoisie was returning to its historic policy of expansion towards the

east.

He detailed how the European Union had been plunged into a deep crisis following the outbreak of the financial crash of 2008. Germany's response was the revival of militarism. As was the case in 1914 and 1939, Germany was once again seeking to dominate Europe in order to become a world power. Schwarz illustrated this with reference to a web site run by the Foreign Office, with an article emblazoned with the headline: "Germany's destiny: lead Europe in order to lead the world". "A few years ago such a proclamation would have unleashed a storm of indignation," Schwarz said.

The new German militarism is accompanied by historical revisionism, he continued: "The crimes of Germany in the First and Second World Wars are being systematically glossed over and presented in new light." A central role in this revisionism is being played by Humboldt University in Berlin, which has repeatedly tried to censor the youth and student organization of the PSG.

At the end of his report Schwarz then dealt with the question "what could be done to prevent war?" The threat of war, he stressed, is not attributable to the misguided beliefs of individual politicians. "The driving force for war is the deep crisis of world capitalism, manifested particularly in the growth of extreme social inequality," he said.

This means it is not possible to oppose war without taking up a struggle against capitalism. Schwarz cited the statement of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) on "Socialism and the Fight against Imperialist War" which states: "There can be no struggle for socialism without a struggle against war, and vice versa, no struggle against war without fighting for socialism". It is necessary to build the PSG and the

ICFI as the world party of the working class.

Peter Schwarz's contribution was followed by a discussion that initially revolved around the PSG and its political perspective.

"The PSG is the German section of the Fourth International," Schwarz explained. "Our work focuses on the defense and development of Marxism and socialist principles. Our movement has historically defended these principles against Stalinism. Stalinism was not a product of the October Revolution, but rather emerged as a reaction against it. We base ourselves on the work of Leon Trotsky, who defended against Stalin the principles that formed the basis of the October Revolution. The program and principles defended by the Trotskyist Left Opposition and the Fourth International are now crucial for the international working class which lacks a political perspective."

One participant at the meeting commented on media reports which gave the impression that the German army (*Bundeswehr*) was completely outdated and its equipment in very bad condition.

Schwarz responded that such reports are a key part of the current militarist campaign. "It is transparent propaganda. The Bundeswehr can only carry out its newly prescribed role if its budget is boosted by billions. What stands in the way is that such a policy is rejected by a majority of the population. The attempt to overcome this rejection lies behind the numerous media reports referring to the army's decrepit state."

A discussion was sparked by the question as to why the call "Workers of the world unite" was not able to prevent the outbreak of the First World War. "Why did people volunteer for war?," an audience member asked. "Where was the working class?"

Schwarz replied that at the beginning of the First World War there was broad opposition in the German working class. "The SPD had carried out anti-war propaganda over years and the rejection of war was widespread among workers. Important resolutions were adopted against war in Stuttgart in 1907 and in Basel in 1912. Shortly before the war began hundreds of thousands of workers in Germany had taken to the streets to express their opposition."

The enthusiasm for the war was centered in layers of the educated middle class, civil servants, academics and business representatives, he said. Decisive, however, was the vote by the SPD parliamentary faction on

August 4, 1914 to approve war credits.

"If there is an event in history that deserves the name 'betrayal' then this is it," Schwarz said. Claiming that one could not desert one's country in its hour of need, the SPD disarmed the working class in a critical situation.

Another question was related to the size of the PSG. "So far we are not a mass party, but we are openly advocating a revolutionary policy and perspective," Schwarz said, adding that the growing social polarization demands such a perspective. The political vacuum is confirmed by a number of recent movements, most of which are right wing.

"It is, however, impossible to implement a serious policy without thinking through the issues carefully and understanding their origin," Schwarz warned. "Improvisation leads to a dead end. We are building an international party based on the great traditions of Marxism. Not a single social problem can be solved on a national basis in the age of globalization."

Schwarz urged all those present to join the Fourth International and actively take up the struggle against war.



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