

Meetings in Germany mark the 75th anniversary of the death of Leon Trotsky

Our correspondents
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More than 200 people attended meetings in Germany marking the 75th anniversary of the assassination of Leon Trotsky, held by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in the German cities of Berlin, Frankfurt and Bochum. At the centre of the discussions at the meetings was the contemporary significance of Leon Trotsky's life and ideas in light of the present drive towards war and dictatorship.

Almost 100 students and workers attended the meeting at Humboldt University in Berlin. Peter Schwarz, the secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), began the main lecture with an analysis of the present social, political, and geopolitical crisis.

“Capitalist society once again faces a deep crisis worldwide. Militarism, nationalism and fascist forces are on the rise,” said Schwarz. “The horrific November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris arrived almost on cue to advance this agenda. Leading German newspapers—especially the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Die Welt*—have responded to the terror attacks by calling for an authoritarian state and a right-wing government.”

The majority of workers and young people are opposed to this drive, Schwarz said, but their opposition can find no political expression and no perspective. As at the end of the Weimar Republic in the 1930s, today a small clique threaten to push through an extreme right-wing agenda, if they remain unopposed.

In this situation, the study of the significance of Trotsky's life and writings is of great importance.

The assassination of Trotsky was the culmination of a political genocide, said Schwarz. “The Stalinist terror was directed against the entire socialist culture that had been developed over decades by the Marxists, especially here in Germany. This had struck deep roots in the consciousness of the working class and had blossomed in the Soviet Union after the October Revolution. Without

this beheading of the socialist workers' movement, the Second World War and the Holocaust could not have happened.”

Trotsky was the most outstanding representative of this generation of revolutionary socialists. Early on, he had understood the importance of an international perspective and developed the Theory of Permanent Revolution. Based on this, he was not only the most important leader of the October Revolution next to Lenin, but also an implacable opponent of the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union.

Trotsky understood like no other the objective driving forces that pushed German capitalism towards war and fascism. To force the working class into another world war, all the workers' organizations had to be smashed. “The task of fascism lies not only in destroying the communist vanguard, but also in maintaining the whole class in a state of forced disunity,” Schwarz quoted from Trotsky's 1932 essay, *What Next?*

Based on this understanding, Trotsky had advocated a united front of the workers' parties—the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the German Communist Party (KPD)—against the Nazis. The KPD refused to recognize the danger of fascism, calling the SPD the social-fascist twin brother of the Nazis and finally, when Hitler became chancellor, organized no resistance.

When the KPD and the Communist International drew no lessons from this disaster, Trotsky concluded that the Third International could no longer be reformed and called for the construction of the Fourth International. “Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, the whole culture of mankind is threatened with disaster,” Schwarz quoted from the founding document of the Fourth International. “Everything depends now on the proletariat, that is, chiefly its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership.”

The second speaker, Sven Wurm, the IYSSE's representative in the student parliament at Humboldt University, spoke about the importance of these issues for the work of the IYSSE at the universities. It was no coincidence, Wurm said, that the ideological preparation for war at the universities went hand in hand with attacks on the historical legacy of Leon Trotsky.

The presentations were followed by a lively discussion, which continued even after the meeting, on the current war drive as well as historical questions about the life and ideas of Trotsky.

In Frankfurt, about 50 workers and youth took part in the meeting, which also ended with a lively discussion following the report by Schwarz. The question of building a revolutionary party was at the centre of the discussion. One participant suggested that the IYSSE and SEP seek to make alliances with other "left" parties and organizations. A student agreed with this and raised the question of whether participation in the existing trade unions was necessary "to restore workers' confidence in their own strength."

Schwarz stressed that such a perspective was doomed to failure. "The very first question," said Schwarz, "should read: On what basis do we build our party?" The German revolutionary Karl Liebknecht answered this question with the words: "First clarity, then unity." Schwarz continued, "Why is there no broad socialist movement in the working class today? This can only be understood if one understands the historical crimes of the Stalinists. We have already talked about their mass killings, and their policies led to truly historic, devastating defeats."

Those who want to join forces with all sorts of movements regardless of their political program should study the example of Syriza in Greece, continued Schwarz. "Syriza, Podemos, Die Linke in Germany—these parties are found everywhere, and are composed of different groups calling themselves in part, 'socialist,' some even 'Marxist.' Basically, they are parties of the upper middle class. They have replaced class politics by identity, gender, environmentalism. They are bourgeois parties, and once they come to power, they implement right-wing policies."

Responding to the question about the unions, Schwarz replied, "If there has been one factor in the last 30 years that has destroyed the confidence of the workers, then it is the trade unions." He explained that globalization had undermined the foundations of the national reformist policies of social democracy and the trade unions.

Schwarz described how the unions have been integrated

into the corporations and developed into a form of industrial police, suppressing any social opposition. "The *World Socialist Web Site* is full of reports of how the trade unions sell out workers' struggles. In every area, whether it is air travel, the railways, or day-care centres, workers regard the unions today with hatred. They no longer see them as their representatives."

Similar questions also came up at the meeting at the Ruhr University in Bochum, where more than 60 attended. A steelworker spoke up and explained that workers in his factory who wanted to defend their rights were immediately confronted with the trade union bureaucracy.

One audience member asked how fascism could have been prevented in Germany. At that time too, the central problem was also the question of leadership in the working class, replied Schwarz. The Stalinist leadership of the Third International and KPD left the workers totally unprepared to fight the Nazis.

Questions were also raised about the danger of world war. When one student raised the question of whether China was the aggressor in the Pacific, Schwarz made it unmistakably clear that the US, with its "pivot to Asia," was specifically preparing a war against China to enforce its dominance in Asia with its military power.

"In the US, there are powerful voices within ruling circles discussing whether they should go to war against China as soon as possible, instead of waiting until China has upgraded its military," said Schwarz. He noted that there had been very similar discussion in the German bourgeoisie with regard to Russia prior to the outbreak of World War I.



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