

IYSSE meeting in Berlin discusses the Syrian war and the aims of German imperialism in the Middle East

Our correspondent
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Last Wednesday, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) launched its campaign for the student parliament at Humboldt University (HU) in Berlin, Germany with a series of lectures on the subject “Not another war! Scholarship, not war propaganda.”

“70 years after the end of World War II, the world is a powder keg,” reads the promotional flyer announcing the lectures. “The decision by the federal government to participate in the war in Syria marks a new stage in the return of German militarism, increasing the risk of another world war.”

Dozens of students and young workers filled the lecture room and carefully followed the first lecture by Johannes Stern, a member of the editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, on the topic of “The Syrian War and the aims of German imperialism in the Middle East.”

In his introduction, Sven Wurm, the leader of the IYSSE group at Humboldt University and a member of the Student Parliament (StuPa), stressed that the war mission in Syria just approved by the Bundestag (parliament) was “not a short-term adventure,” but a turning point with far-reaching consequences. The IYSSE is participating in the StuPa elections on January 19-20 2016 to “oppose the drive towards war and to build an anti-war movement.” This requires “a precise knowledge of the central political and historical issues.”

“Germany is at once in the midst of war. And it is already clear that we are just at the beginning,” Stern said. In the current edition of news weekly *Der Spiegel*, defence minister von der Leyen spoke of a “long struggle,” and the former Bundeswehr (armed forces)

Inspector General Harald Kujat raised the prospect of deploying 50,000 to 60,000 NATO soldiers as ground troops if the current strategy against the IS (Islamic State) failed.

The haste with which the Bundestag agreed to the war mission in Syria had surprised many people. But it had been long prepared and was part of Germany’s return to aggressive foreign and great power politics, as announced by President Gauck and the federal government in early 2014.

Just one and a half years later, the German elites could barely keep their new “geopolitical power fantasies” under control, Stern said, referring to the “Schlüterhof Discussions” between the two Humboldt Professors Herfried Münkler and Jörg Baberowski last Monday. In his presentation, Münkler outlined the geographic area to which Germany’s new “realpolitik,” or rather war policy, must expand. It was the same as had stood in the focus of the German business associations, general staff and geo-strategists in the First and Second World War, Stern said.

“We have two post-imperial spaces that cause us worry,” quoting Münkler. “One goes from the Western Balkans to the Caspian Sea and the other is the entire Arab region.” The “major challenges of European stability and security” ranged “from the eastern Balkans to the Caucasus” and the “space between Mesopotamia and Libya, the Levant and the Indian Ocean,” to the “opposite shore of the Mediterranean and on the other side of the Sahara.”

Later in his presentation, Stern pointed to the historical continuity represented in the current German war policy in the Middle East. In the period before and during the First World War, the resource-rich and geo-

strategically important region had played a central role for German imperialism.

Stern spoke about the “Oriental Trip” of Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1898, the subsequent construction of the Baghdad railway and the so-called “revolutionary programme” of the German Empire in the First World War. At that time, the aim of the foreign ministry and the Army Supreme Command had been to provoke an Islamic uprising against British rule in Egypt and India in order to push through German interests in the region.

Also in the second German “grab for world power” (in the words of Historian Fritz Fischer), the Middle East was of great importance. Stern spoke about the German-Italian Africa campaign, the failed attempts to install a pro-German regime in Iraq, citing, *inter alia*, the memorandum “Politics and war in the Middle East” (1939) by Professor Oscar Ritter von Niedermayer, who taught at the University of Berlin at that time and who developed war strategies for German imperialism.

“While the German elites were forced by their crimes in two world wars to bite their lips to some extent, at least since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany 25 years ago, they are again speaking openly about their imperialist appetites in the Middle East” said Stern.

He quoted from a strategy paper of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in 2001, which states, “The fundamental German interest in the region is quickly defined.” The general aim was to ensure a “smooth supply of raw materials ... and export opportunities for the German economy,” as well as “the freest possible market access and to meet the competition of the United States, the Eastern European countries, but also the East Asian industrial countries.”

Stern stressed that the return of aggressive German imperialism and the growing threat of war had their roots in the “deep contradictions of capitalism and its nation-state system.” The contradiction between global production and the nation-states, upon which the economic and financial elites were based, threatens humanity with a third world war, which would take place between nuclear-armed powers. Today’s powder keg in the Middle East, where all the imperialist powers and Russia are intervening militarily in one form or another, could explode like the powder keg of the Balkans one hundred years ago. This was shown by the shooting down of a Russian fighter jet by Turkey last

month.

To rely on the hope that the ruling circles themselves are afraid of such a development is a dangerous illusion. In 1934 Leon Trotsky had warned: “Only the fear of the consequences of a new war currently slows the urge of imperialism towards war. But the power of this brake is limited.” Five years later, these brakes failed, and the Second World War began.

At the end of his contribution, Stern called for those present to participate in the establishment of an anti-war movement directed against capitalism, and to support the election campaign of the IYSSE. “A point has been reached where one can no longer be indifferent,” Stern said.

Following the presentation, there was an intensive debate about Germany’s current geo-strategic interests; the Western war policy in the Middle East since the invasion of Iraq in 2003; the formation and the politics of Islamic State and the role of warmongers like Humboldt University professors Herfried Münkler and Jörg Baberowski. The next meeting will take place on Wednesday, December 16 at the HU. The theme will be: “Herfried Münkler: An academic in the service of German imperialism.”



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