

SEP election meeting in Berlin discusses war, nationalism after Brexit vote

Our correspondents
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On Thursday, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party of Germany, PSG) held its first election meeting as part of the Berlin elections. The theme was, “After the Brexit vote: Nationalism and Militarism in Europe.” The event met with considerable interest and made for a strong start to the series of meetings the PSG is hosting during this crucial stage in the Berlin election campaign.

Approximately 40 people attended the event in the Schöneberg district of Berlin. Dozens more listened in on the Livestream feed. The meeting demonstrated the importance of the PSG’s decision to place the struggle against war at the centre of its campaign. Those in attendance encountered a party that can explain where the drive to war comes from and, above all, fights for an international socialist program around which the working class can be mobilized against war.

“Germany is heavily arming its military once again,” explained Christoph Vandreier, the assistant national secretary of the PSG and candidate for the constituency of Tempelhof-Schöneberg 2. “We appeal to the fighting spirit of the working population and youth. Our goal is not the reform of capitalism, but its abolition.”

Peter Schwarz, secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and chief editor of the German edition of the *World Socialist Web Site*, delivered the main report. Schwarz explained that nationalism, which found expression in the Brexit referendum, can only be understood in the context of the growing threat of war and the crisis in Europe.

Schwarz began his remarks with a forceful presentation on the global geopolitical situation. He quoted from the ICFI statement from February 2016, “Socialism and the Fight against War,” which reads:

“The world stands on the brink of a catastrophic global conflict. The statements of heads of capitalist governments grow increasingly bellicose. The proxy wars in Ukraine and Syria have drawn NATO and Russia closer to a full-scale confrontation ... As in the years that preceded the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and World War II in 1939, political

leaders and military planners are approaching the conclusion that a war between major powers is not a remote possibility, but, rather, highly probable and, perhaps, even inevitable.”

This assessment has been fully confirmed, commented Schwarz, before describing how far the preparations for war had advanced since then. NATO continues its encirclement of Russia. In Syria, where the Western powers have for years attempted to bring about regime change like in Iraq and Libya, the war has continued to escalate. Schwarz explained: “Because Russia’s intervention has recently shifted the balance in Assad’s favour, the US media has suddenly discovered that people are dying there—although that has of course been the case for years.”

“The world stands on the brink of a catastrophic military conflict,” commented Schwarz. “The proxy wars in Ukraine and Syria have brought us closer to an open confrontation between NATO and Russia.”

As a consequence, tensions between the major powers are growing. Schwarz explained: “This development inevitably leads to larger imperialist wars and could even lead to the outbreak of a war between the US and Germany.” The turn in Germany’s foreign and security policy over the last three years, which has led to a massive rearmament of the Bundeswehr, can only be understood in this context.

The outcome of this turn is now presented in the so-called “White Book 2016.” This “foundational security policy document on the future of the Bundeswehr” has “become the official policy of the German government,” said Schwarz. He demonstrated that Germany placed its national interests at the heart of the White Paper and demanded that Europe—under German leadership—must play a leading role in the world. The White Paper states that as a long term goal, “Germany would strive for a joint European security and defence union.”

Schwarz then took up the deeper causes behind this progression toward new wars, explaining that they are to be found in two fundamental contradictions of the world capitalist system: “The economy today is a global economy and billions of people are dependent on one another ... the

global division of labour has led to an enormous development. The global economy, however, is not organized globally, but rather is split up into nation states that are in conflict with each other.” Second, production is organized socially but privately owned: “This serves the accumulation of private profit, not the satisfaction of social need.”

Schwarz discussed further characteristics of contemporary society and spoke about the dramatic growth of social inequality. In this context, he explained the “financialisation” of today’s economy, which has created an even greater speculative bubble than in 2008 prior to the global stock market crisis. In comparison with actual production, an ever larger portion of earnings is obtained through pure financial speculation. The stocks, money supply and financial markets are exploding while at the same time production stagnates.

Only those who understand this entire development in context can also understand the growth of the nationalism and xenophobia revealed in the Brexit referendum.

The same nationalist development finds expression in several countries: in the rise of Donald Trump in the US, in the Freedom Party of Austria, the National Front in France, Alternative for Germany as well as the UK Independence Party of Nigel Farage in Britain.

Schwarz continued: “The vilification of refugees, which we are witnessing today, and the steady shift to the right of all parties, including the Left Party in Germany, is in the final analysis an expression of the interests of affluent layers of the middle class who set the agenda for politics.”

Schwarz stressed that the PSG was “opposed to all forms of nationalism and xenophobia and calls for the unity of all workers regardless of their skin colour, ethnicity, religion, gender or whatever may be used to divide the working class.”

“The right-wing movement can only win support on the basis of the complete bankruptcy of the official left,” Schwarz continued. “Here in Berlin, everyone can see it: It was here that the Left Party governed for 10 years, from 2001 to 2011, and in no other state were social cuts as severe as in Berlin during this period. The Left Party made Berlin into the capital of poverty.”

Schwarz then described the principled political fight of the Socialist Equality Party in Britain, which called for an active boycott of the Brexit referendum. He quoted the words of SEP National Secretary Chris Marsden: “We want to see the destruction of the EU, but not through the nationalist fracturing of the continent ... Our rallying cry is: No to the EU and British nationalism—For the United Socialist States of Europe! Our goal is the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International

throughout Europe.”

After the talk, a lively discussion took place and a number of questions were raised. Participants in the meeting room as well as online made contributions. In addition to questions about the presentation, there was also questions about the strike movement in France and the role of the pseudo-left.

One attendee asked whether the former Greek finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis of the Syriza government, always stood on the side of the ruling class or had allowed himself to be bought by them. Peter Schwarz answered that Varoufakis was among the richest people in Greece. “He didn’t have to be bought.” Christoph Vandreier reported on his experience in Greece during the referendum and described Syriza’s betrayal.

One visitor explained that this was her first time at an election meeting of the PSG and wanted to know: “Why have you placed the theme of war at the centre of your election campaign? Was that a tactical consideration? And haven’t all the other parties built their campaigns around the issue of refugees?”

Several participants answered this and explained the connection between the growing number of refugees and war. Other contributions described how the inhumane treatment of refugees in Berlin was used to incite racism, divide the working class and impose militarist policies.

PSG national secretary and leading candidate Ulrich Rippert emphasized that the decision to place the question of war at the centre of the campaign was not a tactical consideration. “We place this issue at the centre of the campaign because of all problems with which workers and youth are confronted, the growing threat of war is the most significant.”

In the advance towards war, the crisis of capitalism is revealed in its sharpest form. “Workers can only defend their social and democratic rights if they oppose war in every country as part of an international movement. In order to build such a movement, we are intervening in this election. Workers need a socialist perspective and must have as their goal the overthrow of capitalism. There can be no fight for socialism without a fight against war and there can be no fight against war without a fight for socialism.”



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