

SEP US presidential candidates denounce war drive at Humboldt University meeting in Berlin

Our correspondents
6 September 2016

Dozens of students and workers watched a live broadcast of the Socialist Equality Party's US presidential candidates at Humboldt University on Friday. Jerry White and Niles Niemuth spoke via videoconference from Detroit. They delivered speeches and answered questions of those present.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) advertised the meeting under the title "Neither Trump nor Clinton: Socialists in the US presidential elections." The IYSSE's spokesman at HU, Sven Wurm, explained the importance of the US presidential election for workers and youth around the world.

"American imperialism represents an enormous threat," Wurm said. "The military encirclement of Russia and China could quickly develop into a general war that would threaten the future of humanity. At the same time, the only social force which can stop such a catastrophe is the American and international working class."

In his speech, White first dealt with the deep crisis of American democracy. "While the political establishment is moving to the right, the population as a whole is moving to the left," he said. "The US elections are an expression of the deep decay of American democracy, which has been fuelled by decades of economic decline and the rise to the pinnacle of social and political life of a criminal financial aristocracy."

Both candidates are among the most unpopular figures in establishment politics. The Republican candidate Donald Trump displays fascistic characteristics and is exploiting social anger for an extremely right-wing agenda. "It is not necessary to explain to a German audience the significance of the rise of such a political figure, one who bases his program on extreme nationalism and xenophobia, who increasingly appeals to violence and the most backward sentiments," White stated.

But Clinton and the Democrats do not represent an alternative, White explained. Their right-wing politics had made Trump's rise possible. "Hillary Clinton is the

personification of the corrupt nexus between the political establishment, the military-intelligence apparatus and Wall Street," White added.

The Democrats are seeking to use the election and hostility to Trump to proclaim a mandate for war. This is why the Democrats criticize Trump from the right and demand an aggressive militarist policy against Russia and China.

With reference to the advocates of identity politics backing Clinton, White added, "For the world's people, it does not make the slightest difference if the person launching a nuclear war is a woman or man."

The only force capable of stopping this madness is the American and German working class. "The task of our election campaign is to politically educate the working class and explain what genuine socialism is, and to prepare for the immense struggles—against war, inequality and dictatorship—that are coming," said White.

Growing interest in socialism among workers and youth was expressed in the support for the campaign of Bernie Sanders, who described himself as a democratic socialist. But Sanders' program had nothing to do with socialism. Niemuth dealt in particular with Sanders' nationalism and his support for American imperialism and its numerous wars.

Various petty bourgeois and pseudo-left groups assisted Sanders in selling this right-wing program as socialist, he said. In contrast, the SEP is participating in the election to fight for genuine socialism.

"Having identified this initial anticapitalist sentiment that lay behind the Sanders campaign," said Niemuth, "we in the SEP have an obligation to provide a genuine socialist political orientation and fight to develop a revolutionary leadership. We must provide workers and young people with the ability to discern genuine socialism from all those who seek to trap them. Without the conscious intervention of our movement, the Trotskyist movement, all of the oppositional sentiment will certainly be redirected back into the dead end

of the Democratic Party and back behind the capitalist system.”

The contributions were followed by a lively discussion, which was continued at the bookstall and in the hallways after the meeting ended. One student explained that neoliberalism aimed at destroying the class consciousness of the working class. Many no longer see themselves as workers. He asked what the SEP’s strategy was to reproduce class consciousness.

White explained that the SEP does not proceed on the basis of the consciousness that workers have today, but from their objective situation. Workers are being driven into struggles throughout the world because their living conditions are being destroyed and a policy of war is being pursued. As Marx and Engels explained, the history of mankind is the history of class struggle, which had assumed very sharp forms in the United States and contained important lessons.

The ruling class had always tried to suppress these struggles and divide workers along ethnic, cultural or linguistic lines. In opposition to this, socialists fight for the unity of all workers against the capitalists.

Stalinism inflicted a series of terrible defeats on the working class, White continued, and numerous petty-bourgeois groups had written it off as a revolutionary force. In addition, there was the role of the trade unions, which have become transformed into agents of the corporations and policemen over the working class.

The central issue, he said, is the building of a revolutionary leadership to transform the working class into an independent political force. The working class is the only social force that has an objective interest in overcoming capitalism and the irrational nation-state system, but for this, the lessons of history had to be drawn.

Niemuth dealt in more detail with the experiences of American workers with the trade unions. They stand on the side of corporate management and have imposed attacks on the working class. Workers have to organize independently of these organizations, he said.

White explained once again the role played by identity politics in dividing the working class and representing the interests of a privileged middle class. The demand for more women or blacks in top jobs has nothing to do with the struggle against inequality or war. “America is not divided into black and white, but between the classes,” explained White. “We fight for the unification of the international working class.”

A student from Egypt asked how the working class in the Middle East could be supported and where the SEP stood on the “war on terror” and the collaboration of the US government with dictators.

White explained that the SEP emphatically opposed the US government’s alleged “war on terror,” which is based on lies and has been used to justify one horrific war after the next.

The enormous power of the working class, he said, was shown in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, which overthrew a US-backed regime. But the revolution raised fundamental problems of revolutionary leadership. Pseudo-left groups like the Revolutionary Socialists did everything to subordinate the workers to one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, said White. They first supported the Muslim Brotherhood and then a military coup. The same forces now criticize Obama for not intervening decisively enough in Syria.

In his concluding comments, White warned: “The German and the American working class is facing the same struggle against the same transnational corporations and above all against the danger of the repeat of the horrific catastrophes of the 20th century, however this time fought with nuclear weapons.

“But the drive towards war is an expression of the deep crisis of American capitalism and the capitalist system around the world. The crisis of the nation-state system, the global economic crisis also gives rise to its opposite: that is, the emergence of the working class throughout the world.”

The audience responded with excitement to the contributions and the discussion. Sven Wurm declared in conclusion that the questions discussed at the meeting would also play a central role in the Berlin state elections. In the election to the Berlin state House of Representatives, the sister organization of the SEP, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG), is running to build an international antiwar movement on the basis of the fight for socialism.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact