

Berlin IYSSE meeting on Trump election provokes intense discussion

Our correspondents
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Last Wednesday, nearly 100 students attended a meeting organized by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Humboldt University (HU) in Berlin. The theme of the meeting was “The election of Trump: Political causes and lessons.” The large attendance and intense discussion at the meeting indicates that a new generation of young workers and students is being radicalized and is seeking a political perspective to oppose reaction and war.

Following the introductory report by *World Socialist Web Site* editor Johannes Stern, which we have already reported, many of the mostly very young students participated in the discussion and left their contact details after the meeting. A number of questions were raised.

There was an intensive discussion as to what extent Trump’s victory could be compared to the development of fascism and war in the 1930s.

Johannes Stern remarked that unlike Hitler, Trump did not emerge from a Munich beer hall, but rather from Wall Street. Trump’s ascent was, like Hitler’s in Germany, the result of a deep crisis of capitalism, to which the ruling elite had responded. But, “Unlike Hitler,” he said, “Trump did not come to power at the head of a fascist mass movement, but under conditions where workers and young people are increasingly orientating to the left, but lack an international, revolutionary, anti-capitalist and socialist mass movement.”

This is mainly due to the role played by the trade unions and the official left. “In reality, they have nothing to do with ‘left’ politics, but rather represent the interests of wealthy middle class layers,” Stern said, “which base themselves on various forms of identity politics.” They have only contempt for the interests of the workers. They thereby enabled far-right and

nationalist forces to channel these growing social antagonisms.

Peter Schwarz, editor of the German-language WSWs, added that the danger of a Trump administration should not be underestimated. Even if at the moment Trump lacked a fascist mass movement, the forces he had mobilized could quickly develop in this direction. It is “less about the question of his person than about the fact that democracy is collapsing due to huge social tensions.” Trotsky once compared democracy to an electric circuit that could blow when social tensions became too intense. That is exactly what happened with the election of Trump, he said.

When asked by one participant whether a socialist revolution was needed and whether there was not a less radical alternative to defuse the situation, Schwarz replied, “Is it possible to solve the problems of social inequality and war without challenging the basis of the capitalist system, private ownership of the means of production, and the enormous power of finance capital? The last 25 years have proved that this is not possible. What is needed is a socialist program, and you can only do this when you gain support and mobilize the working class. This is the central task.”

In his closing comments, the meeting chairman and IYSSE spokesman at HU, Sven Wurm, appealed to the students: “We cannot choose the period to live in. Whether we want it or not, we are returning to a period of war and revolution and we have to prepare accordingly.”

The main focus of the work of the IYSSE was the struggle against war propaganda at the universities, Wurm said. He referred to the IYSSE open letter to Professor Thomas Sandkühler, who had called on students in his courses not to attend IYSSE meetings. “In the letter we explain how he defends the key

positions of Professor Jörg Baberowski and seeks to suppress any discussion about the ideological preparation for war and dictatorship taking place at the HU.”

The IYSSE, however, is not intimidated, but rather stepping up its work. At the meeting of the student parliament on Monday it would be submitting a motion against the campaign by the Bundeswehr to recruit newcomers at the HU.

After the meeting, Katja, a member of the IYSSE group and a member of the student parliament, spoke with two students of German literature and philosophy at the HU, Céleste and Alessia.

“It’s good that people are mobilized and shaken awake,” Céleste said. She declared she is “relatively speechless about the election of Trump, he is more of a joke figure.”

Alessia added, “What does it say about humanity when, after all that has happened in history, such a man comes to power 80 years later? It is incomprehensible that the [far-right] AfD wins such a large number of votes. The shift to the right in Europe and all over the world is extremely disturbing,” she said.

Regarding the meeting she said: “I think it’s right to wake people up and that this discussion is taking place. One should not trivialize the election of Trump, as was said today. Obama has now said he will ensure that a smooth transition takes place. But that is just politics. Trump was quite different in his election campaign. Apart from his racist commentaries, he also put forward extreme positions against women. That is not only misogynist, but also anti-humanistic.”

In fact “the whole system has completely broken down,” continued Alessia. “The fallacy of the democratic system in America is that there are only two parties to choose from and nothing in between.” She could not take the Democrats “seriously,” even though she “would rather have Clinton elected than Trump.”

She was more thoughtful when Clinton’s right-wing policy as a representative of Wall Street and American militarism was raised: “Yes, perhaps politics would be simply carried out under a cloak of a democratic ideology. The presentation of politics would perhaps be different with Clinton, but the facts on the ground would probably be very similar.”

Clinton’s role in the NATO war against Libya was also raised. “That’s a catastrophe. They just went into

Libya, shot Gaddafi and then went away again,” Alessia said angrily. “The state is completely disorganised; there is no leadership at all. And then everyone wonders why thousands of people are trying to get to Europe. This is the payback for the sabotage of these countries for years. And now one feigns surprise.”

Céleste was concerned about the growing threat of a Third World War under Trump. “America is financing itself with war.” Now, with such a choleric man as the world’s leader, she said, nuclear war may be on the agenda. Alessia added: “Trump has always said that it was necessary to wipe out ISIS. The danger of war is now much higher than under Obama. This is a terrible development.”



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