

Successful IYSSE meeting on Trump at Ruhr University in Bochum

Our reporters
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The meeting “Where is America going? The election of Trump and the global struggle against militarism and war,” on January 31 in Bochum, was an important step in the building of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). Most of the close to 50 participants were students from Ruhr University Bochum, who despite the rapidly approaching examination period did not want to miss the lecture and discussion.

Trump’s presidency was an “historical turning point,” said Philipp Frisch, the spokesperson for the IYSSE in North Rhine-Westphalia, at the beginning of the meeting. Already during the first week of his presidency Trump had adopted measures leading to war, dictatorship and major social attacks. “Only a mass movement of the working class can stop this development,” Frisch said. The preparation of a socialist and internationalist basis for such a movement was the most important task of the IYSSE, he added.

Johannes Stern, who gave the main speech, is a member of the IYSSE and the editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*. He first provided an overview of the right-wing decrees that Trump has issued in the first days of his presidency, including a travel ban on Muslims and refugees, the construction of a wall on the border with Mexico, and the “rebuilding” of the US military to prepare for conflicts with “near peer competitors” like Russia and China.

The illusion that Trump would act in a less extreme manner than during the election campaign evaporated into thin air in the first week of his presidency. Trump’s right-wing and militarist policies do not merely express the individual brutality of the president, but is the programme of the American oligarchy. “Trump’s cabinet is a collection of multibillionaires, millionaires, business leaders, top intelligence officials and leading military personnel—a government of the rich, by the rich and for the rich,” stated Stern.

Trump’s slogan “Make America great again” meant in practice the abolition of all social achievements won by the American working class in the course of historic struggles. And behind the demand “America first” is the Trump administration’s aim to impose the global interests of the US as ruthlessly as possible. “Trump will escalate conflict with every country whose geopolitical and economic interests stand in the

way of the US,” Stern warned.

Germany would be one of the main targets of this and the ruling class was becoming increasingly conscious of this fact. Stern cited an article from the latest edition of *Der Spiegel*, which warned of an “unprecedented break in transatlantic relations” since the Second World War and even warned of a “shift from friend to foe.”

All of the fundamental historical questions and contradictions, which led to two world wars and the Russian Revolution in the last century, were back on the order of the day, according to Stern. The “end of history” proclaimed by the bourgeois ideologists in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union had been exposed as premature and now history was returning with a vengeance.

Stern said of the ongoing mass demonstrations in the US that there had never been a time in history when already on the first day in office of a US president, millions of people had taken to the streets to protest against them. “These protests have made one thing clear: Trump did in no sense come to power because of a shift to the right among the white working class.”

Stern supported this with statistics and dealt with those chiefly responsible for Trump’s electoral victory: the Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton attacked Trump from the right in the election campaign and assailed him as an “agent of Putin.” His predecessor Barack Obama had been supported eight years ago by many workers as the candidate of “hope” and “change,” but had then continued the war policies of George W. Bush and offloaded the burden of the 2008 financial crisis onto the working class, Stern said.

In addition, there was Bernie Sanders, the pseudo-left organisations and the trade unions, he said. “In the primaries, Sanders won support above all because he portrayed himself as a socialist and called for a political revolution against the billionaire class. He subsequently called for a vote for Clinton, a representative of Wall Street and the political establishment, giving Trump the opportunity to exploit widespread anger and direct it in a nationalist direction.”

Trump’s rise could only be understood in connection with the political developments of the past 25 years. Stern referred, among other things, to the US-led wars of aggression in Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan, the fundamental breakdown

of American democracy (the “stolen election” of 2000, Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, Obama’s programme of drone murder) and the extreme social polarisation in the country, which has been accompanied by a vast strengthening of the state apparatus.

“If Trump is now stepping up militarist policies and appoints a navy general to the post of head of Homeland Security, he is merely continuing the domestic and foreign policies of his predecessor,” Stern stated.

The resistance to Trump could only be successful if it was directed against capitalism and all of its representatives and “if it is based on the working class, the decisive revolutionary force in capitalist society.” Therefore, “the defence of democratic rights—including the rights of women, minorities, immigrants and gays [must] be connected with the struggle against inequality, unemployment, poverty, police violence, dictatorship and above all war,” Stern said, citing a passage from a Socialist Equality Party statement titled “The way forward in the struggle against Trump.”

In the last section of his speech, Stern noted that the building of an anti-war movement on a socialist basis was also of great urgency in Europe. The German ruling elite was seizing upon Trump’s confrontational approach as a chance to enforce its own great power plans and press ahead with the return of German militarism.

Stern explained how the latest personnel changes in the Social Democrats (SPD) were connected with the assumption of the US presidency by Trump. They were aimed at imposing the economic and geopolitical interests of German imperialism, in opposition to the US if necessary. New Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel called immediately after Trump’s inaugural address for a “hard” definition of Germany’s own interests and to pursue them throughout Europe and the world. The Left Party is in full agreement with this course and is offering the SPD its support in a potential red-red-green federal coalition government.

Stern ended his remarks by citing David North’s lecture at Göthe University in Frankfurt on October 22, which was recently published by the IYSSE as a pamphlet: “We are living in revolutionary times. The contradictions that give rise to war also prepare the ground for social revolution. Contradicting the claims of the subjectivists and irrationalists, who proclaim the disappearance of the subjective agency of socialist revolution as conceived by Marx, the global development of capitalism during the past half-century has vastly expanded the ranks of the working class. This is the basic force to which Marxists turn. The great challenge that confronts Marxists is the political preparation of a vanguard of advanced workers that can direct the coming mass movement of the working class toward the conquest of political power.”

A long and intense discussion followed the lecture. Issues dealt with included the deep crisis of the European Union, the issue of the defence of democratic rights and the struggle for

socialist consciousness in the working class. One participant expressed the hope that the American justice system would “impose limits” on Trump. Stern described this as a “dangerous illusion.” In 1933, there were many who hoped that it would be possible at some point to “restrain” Hitler and bring him under control.

Long after the end of the meeting, discussions continued at the bookstand in the hallway. Two brothers, Kaspar and Niklas, who study sport and biology, said, “That was a very interesting speech.” It had pointed to “many new aspects” for them. Now was clearly a point in time where many young people were beginning to turn to politics.

“The development with Trump has politicised many people,” said Niklas. “They are directing their gaze towards America, but they understand developments in Europe. What is taking place here in the right-wing scene? And what is happening in Europe with data or with refugees? What will become of the entire European construct?”

One learned little about these concrete issues at university, Paulina, a student of English and religious studies, commented, “But it is always important to discuss these things.” Following Trump’s election, only one professor at the university had spoken about the issue. “That is really a deficit in the education sector. The things happening live are not made an issue. I therefore found this speech very, very important.”

An Iranian couple, both students at Ruhr University, also followed the meeting with considerable interest. “We are shocked about what is currently happening in the United States,” said the young woman, who referred to the travel ban on Muslims, which meant that thousands of people were being turned away or even arrested at airports.

“Trump is declaring Muslims to be second class citizens,” she said. “One only has to exchange the term ‘Muslim’ for ‘Jew,’ then we have a new Hitler.” The latest events also show that capitalism is not working in the United States. “Developments are driving more and more towards war. It affects us all. The speech made that very clear.”



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