

Socialist Equality Party holds election meeting in Berlin

Our reporters

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The Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei—SGP), German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, held an election meeting in the district of Berlin-Schöneberg, where its candidate is Christoph Vandreier. The deputy chairman of the SGP, Vandreier shared the platform with Julie Hyland, assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Britain.

Vandreier outlined the necessity for socialist revolution as the only means to oppose the revival of German militarism and the danger of a nuclear world war, which the SGP has made central to its campaign in the upcoming general election.

Reviewing the discussions taking place in the political think tanks and military journals about a war against North Korea and China, Vandreier said, “What we explained at the beginning of our election campaign becomes very real now: 70 years after the end of the Second World War the capitalist crisis is again leading to fascism and war.”

Once again in Germany, nationalism and militarism are on the rise, Vandreier said: “All the parties are preparing an enormous rearmament. They want Germany to dominate Europe in order to be able to play the role of a world power again. And everybody knows where that led to.”

Vandreier described how the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Left Party support a military build-up but want the German bourgeoisie to organise this independently of the US.

“These parties are the most aggressive representatives of German imperialism,” Vandreier said. “That becomes also clear in their attacks on democratic rights and their support for the extreme right and the relativisation of the Nazi crimes.

“That we, the Socialists, are the only political force today expressing the huge popular opposition to war is itself an expression of the depth of the capitalist crisis.”

It was this that is behind the attack made by the major bourgeois press on the German section of the International Committee, he said, and why Google is censoring the WSWS in close collaboration with the German government. “The reason for that is, that we are representing the socialist tradition and we stand in the tradition of the Russian Revolution,” Vandreier said.

Hyland began her own remarks by citing a selection of headlines in the major English-language press, expressing their concern at the rise of social inequality in Germany and that workers had turned away from the SDP because of its leading role in imposing draconian welfare cuts.

The British media were not concerned about the conditions of German workers, but at the impact of growing class tensions for bourgeois stability across Europe, she explained, especially under

conditions in which they were supporting French President's Emmanuel Macron's labour “reforms”, aimed at stripping workers of any legal protections. They anticipate major class battles, she said, which they fear could spread across national borders.

“This should be consciously kept in mind when reading reports of tensions in the talks between the European Union and the UK over Brexit. No matter how bitter their national rivalries, which are indeed great and are growing, they all know they are sitting on a social and political powder keg. One that becomes ever more explosive as they press ahead with a common agenda of class war at home and military war abroad.”

It was 14 months since the referendum on Britain's membership of the EU returned a narrow majority in favour of Leave. Subsequent events had underscored the significance of the SEP's call for an active boycott of the referendum, she said.

“As we explained, working people were being offered the choice between death by hanging or poison,” she explained. The Remain camp consisted “of all the main bourgeois parties and the City of London, backed by NATO generals and the leaders of the American and European governments. It was based on support for the EU that has been the main instrument for imposing drastic austerity across the continent, especially against Greece, and building a Fortress Europe that daily leaves migrants to drown in the Mediterranean.

“The Leave camp represented the interests of leading hedge funds and other oligarchs such as Rupert Murdoch, who used xenophobic anti-migrant rhetoric and exploited widespread social disaffection to push their ‘Britain First’ campaign based on the superexploitation of the working class.”

The most critical element of the SEP's campaign had been to oppose the purveyors of “left” nationalism, such as the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party who aligned themselves with a Leave vote on the basis that a sovereign British capitalist state was the basis for progressive, anti-austerity policies.

Hyland drew particular attention to the role played by former Labour MP George Galloway. He openly solidarised himself with the right-wing UK Independence Party, describing then UKIP leader Nigel Farage as his ally “in a single cause” and called for “Left, Right” to march together to “victory” in the referendum.

Hyland noted that Farage had addressed a rally of the xenophobic, extreme right Alliance for Germany (AfD) in Berlin just the day before the SGP meeting, alongside AfD deputy leader—Beatrix von Storch—granddaughter of Hitler's finance minister.

Galloway “support for UKIP did not merely muddy the class line, it obliterated it,” Hyland said. He stood beside Farage and “claimed that the dividing lines between right and left, and between the working

class and the ruling class, counted for little when compared to their shared interests in defending British sovereignty.”

This confirmed the ICFI’s appraisal of the pseudo-left as bourgeois tendencies, hostile to socialism and the working class. It was their role that enabled the right-wing to dominate opposition to the EU.

Writing on Galloway’s appearance with Farage, the SEP had explained that the first responsibility of a socialist is to oppose the mixing of class banners. “Our standpoint was to define the position that a politically conscious, independent working-class movement must take. One that rejected both the British capitalist nation state and the European capitalist market. One that began from the interests of the international working class and helped to develop its unity.”

This was critical because the referendum in Britain was only the most advanced expression to date of collapse of all the institutions put in place at the end of the Second World War, under the impact of the global capitalist crisis.

“The fundamental contradiction at the heart of this crisis—between the integrated character of the global economy and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states based on private ownership of the means of production—cannot be solved peacefully under capitalism. It can only be done from below, by the working class in the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe, as an integral part of the fight for world socialism.”

The SEP has oriented itself to the explosive social discontent among masses of workers and youth in Britain and across Europe, she explained. That anger was building, especially after the terrible fire on June 14 at the Grenfell Tower block in West London.

“Such is the indifference and contempt of the political establishment for working people that an official death toll has still not been established,” Hyland said. “At least 80 were killed and hundreds more injured and displaced as a consequence of the fire.”

The fire was not an accident, but a crime, she continued: “People burned to death solely because they are poor and working class in a society in which the only people that matter are the super-rich. So much for Galloway’s paean to ‘national unity’.”

The building had been clad in flammable material to cut costs, she explained. Underneath this a layer of thermal insulation had been added which, when it burns, gives off vast quantities of hydrogen cyanide. In addition, other cost-cutting measures meant that dozens of gas pipes were left exposed, there was no sprinkler system, no central fire alarm system and just one stairwell.

“Grenfell residents who had complained and warned that a catastrophic loss of life was being prepared were not only ignored but threatened with legal action by those responsible for the building.

“Many of those who died, did so because they were told to stay put. But this advice only applies where there is no danger of contagion. As the fire spread rapidly, those inside made desperate phone calls for help. But little help was available,” she said describing the cuts in London’s fire services made by then Mayor Boris Johnson.

“To this day, hundreds of survivors are living in hotels or temporary accommodation. At least 20 of these have tried to commit suicide since the blaze because of their trauma and the lack of support. Thousands of people across the country face similar danger as the same dangerous materials have been used on hundreds of tower blocks, on schools and hospitals.”

This was social murder, just as Frederick Engels had described it more than 150 years before in his famous work, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. But no one had been arrested or even cautioned. “Instead the very people whose social and political

decisions are responsible for the Grenfell fire are to hold a so-called public inquiry which, like every other before it—from the Iraq war to the Hillsborough tragedy—will be a cover-up,” she warned.

Similar tragedies to Grenfell are replicated in every country throughout the world, Hyland explained, citing a number of examples, including the enormous devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma over the last week on Houston, Florida and the Caribbean islands. In the US, the ruling elite proved incapable of organising even the most elementary evacuation plans. Meanwhile, billions are squandered on wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, and in the building, development and expansion of weapons of mass destruction which—as we can see now in the threats made by the US against North Korea—threaten a nuclear war and the annihilation of the planet.

Hyland outlined the response of Jeremy Corbyn to the Brexit referendum and the Grenfell Tower fire. He had juked his previous opposition to the EU to campaign for a Remain vote in the referendum, she said, and Labour was now in favour of a post-Brexit agreement that will keep the UK’s membership of the Single European Market and Customs Union for an indefinite period, while restricting immigration.

“On Grenfell, Corbyn supports the government-convened inquiry, lending political legitimacy to the cover-up. It is Labour councils themselves that are responsible for the biggest acts of social cleansing, evicting people from their homes and selling the land off to property developers. Labour-run councils are implementing Tory austerity cuts.

“This makes clear that under Corbyn’s leadership, Labour will do the bidding of the ruling elite just as surely as Blair did before him.

“We have seen this before, in Greece, where the Syriza government came to power in 2015. Within days it had juked its opposition to austerity and, alliance with the right-wing Independent Greeks, it has imposed cuts even greater than the Conservative-led coalition it replaced, and is enforcing anti-migrant measures on behalf of the EU.”

Hyland concluded, “We live in dangerous times ... But the same global crisis that drives these developments is also creating the conditions for socialist revolution. We know this because we have the experience of the October 1917 revolution, whose centenary we mark this year.

“In the period immediately ahead the force that will emerge as the alternative to the collapse of bourgeois politics is the international working class,” she said. “What is needed above all is for workers and youth to have their own strategy—a socialist strategy—based not on the map of imperialist nation-state geopolitics and intrigue but on the map of the international class struggle. This is the strategy which the SGP alone brings into this election. It is the only realistic strategy to end social inequality, militarism and war.”

A lively discussion followed the report, with questions on Brexit, the future of UK relations with the US and the EU and the attitude of the German and British bourgeoisie to the danger of world war.



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