

One hundred and fifty attend IYSSE event at Humboldt University on Karl Marx bicentenary

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality
19 January 2018

About 150 students attended the International Youth and Students for Social Equality meeting at Humboldt University in Berlin in support of the IYSSE campaign for the student parliament elections. Held under the title “200 Years of Karl Marx—The validity of Marxism for today,” the meeting included several hours of discussion on social inequality, militarism and the revolutionary perspectives of the Fourth International.

The IYSSE lead candidate in the election, Sven Wurm, introduced the event. He emphasized that the IYSSE did not study Marx out of academic interest. “Only through Marx can the capitalist crisis be understood and a revolutionary perspective for the working class formulated,” he explained.

The editor of the German edition of the *World Socialist Web Site*, Peter Schwarz, then elaborated on Marx’s teachings and the development of Marxism. His speech was divided into three parts, firstly, concerning the principles of Marx’s doctrine; then discussing whether Marxism had been confirmed or refuted in the last 150 years; and finally showing the validity of Marx for today.

Given the countless falsifications of Marxism by Stalinism, social democracy and intellectual tendencies such as the Frankfurt School, it was important to look at what Marx actually said, Schwarz stressed. He then went into detail about Marx’s materialistic conception of history and his dialectical understanding of social development.

On this basis, Marx first established a scientific understanding of human society and its development, which is the prerequisite for changing it. Using detailed quotations from the Communist Manifesto, Schwarz showed how Marx understood the class struggle as the

engine of history and the international working class as a revolutionary force because of its objective mode of existence.

With the outbreak of the First World War, capitalism collapsed, as predicted by Marx, Schwarz explained. The parties of the Second International had turned away from Marxism, supported the war and allowed the rebellious workers to be shot down. The Marxist opponents of the war, especially Lenin and Trotsky, on the other hand, had prepared the revolution. The October Revolution in Russia confirmed the materialist conception of history and the perspective of the Communist Manifesto.

When a bureaucratic layer came to power in the Soviet Union with Stalin, in opposition to the revolution and the working class, Marxism was defended by Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International. Despite its isolation after World War II, the International Committee of the Fourth International held firm to the view that revolutionary workers’ parties had to be built in every country in the world.

When mass strikes and protests by the working class broke out again in 1968, these could be brought under control by the large social democratic and Stalinist bureaucracies, which still exercised great influence among workers. Today, the situation is completely different, explained Schwarz: “The old apparatuses have collapsed, and the International Committee is perceived as the voice of Marxism.”

The Marxist perspective of the Fourth International was completely valid today, Schwarz continued. He cited the remarkable statistics showing that social inequality is greater than ever. The US was preparing for a world war, and militarism was returning in

Germany as well. Under these conditions, the class struggle was growing in Europe and around the world, he said.

“Our primary task now is to systematically, consciously and aggressively build a revolutionary leadership. On this depends a progressive solution to the fundamental problem of humanity—socialism or barbarism.” In conclusion, Schwarz quoted from the New Year’s perspective of the WSWS: “The International Committee of the Fourth International will celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of Karl Marx in accordance with his most famous maxim: ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.’”

The audience followed the lecture with great interest. Afterwards, many questions were asked: About the possibility of socialism and the building of a revolutionary leadership; the experiences of the civic movement in the former East Germany; the First World War; the influence of the mass media and the importance of an independent movement of the working class.

Schwarz and Wurm answered the questions in detail, and other members of the IYSSE also took part in the discussion, which continued in the corridor after the formal end of the event. At the end of the meeting, Wurm explained that the main conclusion to be drawn from the talk and the discussion was to become active and to build the revolutionary leadership. The first step was a vote for the IYSSE in the elections to the student parliament on January 16-17, but everyone at the meeting should take the decision to become an active member of the IYSSE themselves, he said.

The response to the meeting was enormous. Edessa, who studies art history at Humboldt University, said that she had followed the whole lecture intently. “The essential positions of Marxism were impressively summarized,” she said.

Two students from Berlin Technical University, who became aware of the event through posters in front of their university, found the current topicality of the lecture especially significant. The “worldwide sabre-rattling” and the clear shift to the right of the major parties in Germany were very worrying, one of them said.

Koray, who is studying medicine at the Charité Hospital, and who came across the IYSSE through the

student parliament campaign, considers the ideas of Marxism to be highly contemporary, “because I no longer feel that I am represented today,” he explained. “I believe that the policies our country pursues today are not based on the people, but on lobbying and on money, serving the personal interests of a few.”

This could be seen at Siemens, where no consideration for the workers would be taken. “Capitalism is actually against human dignity. That was my motivation for coming here today. That is the actuality of Marxism,” he explained.

“It’s all about social inequality,” he continued. “Militarism is, for me, a consequence of that. Militarism is the politicization of capitalism in the sense of expansionist policies.” At least since Afghanistan, imperialist wars were constantly being waged. Koray agreed that Trump was now showing the true face of American capitalism.

His fellow student Lara, who is studying geography at Humboldt University, added that unlike Obama, “One doesn’t have to read between the lines with Trump.” She worries about the US rhetoric against North Korea: “Trump is unpredictable. That scares me.”

One can hardly imagine a nuclear war because it has never happened, Koray said. “But it changes my attitude to life. I now live a bit with the awareness that the whole world situation is just so uncertain and that a world war really could break out once again.”

There were many who felt like Edessa, Koray and Lara. More than 30 people left their contact details to join the IYSSE, support the IYSSE election campaign and to be invited to other events.



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