

Over 100 attend IYSSE meeting at Ruhr-University Bochum in Germany

Our correspondents
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More than a hundred students and workers attended Wednesday's International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) meeting at the Ruhr-University Bochum in Western Germany. The meeting discussed fundamental questions of Marxism, social inequality, militarism and the revolutionary perspectives of the Fourth International.

The spokesman of the IYSSE at the RUB, Philipp Frisch, chaired what was the largest IYSSE meeting to date at Bochum University. He emphasized at the outset that Marx's analysis and perspective are being confirmed daily. The growing danger of a renewed world war, the massive levels of social inequality and the degeneration of bourgeois rule around the world put the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism on the agenda. Marxism was therefore of paramount importance today. "The IYSSE have set themselves the goal of reviving Marxism at the universities," said Frisch.

Peter Schwarz, editor-in-chief of the German edition of the *World Socialist Web Site*, then addressed Marx's teachings and the historical development of Marxism. In his detailed lecture he dealt with three topics. First, he answered the question: What did Marx really represent? He then reviewed the main arguments within the Marxist movement to show, based on current political developments, how contemporary Marx is today.

In recent weeks, Marx had been widely praised in the media for his far-sighted predictions, but they all separated the economist Marx from his revolutionary conclusions, which he drew from his scientific examination of the prevailing economic, philosophical and political theories, Schwarz emphasized. He then explained Marx's materialist conception of history and his dialectical understanding of social development.

On this basis, Marx was the first to establish a scientific understanding of human society and its development, which is the prerequisite for changing it. Employing

detailed quotations from the Communist Manifesto and other basic writings, 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.

Even during his lifetime, Marx was able to experience how "theory seized the masses". In Germany and in other countries, social democratic mass parties had arisen, based on Marxism, Schwarz explained. With the outbreak of the First World War, capitalism had collapsed, as predicted by Marx. While the parties of the Second International turned away from Marxism and supported the war, the Marxist opponents of the war, especially Lenin and Trotsky, had prepared the revolution. The October Revolution in Russia confirmed the materialist conception of history and the perspective of the *Communist Manifesto*.

The October Revolution was not an automatic objective process but presupposed the leadership of the working class through a Marxist party, the Bolsheviks. Without a conscious revolutionary leadership, the working class would not be able to overthrow capitalism. The construction of a revolutionary leadership in the international working class remains the main task of Marxists today.

He then explained how revolutionary possibilities had failed in Germany, China and other countries in the 1920s and '30s, because the necessary revolutionary leadership was lacking or had failed to rise to the occasion. The destruction of the Third International by the Stalinist bureaucracy had had devastating consequences. Trotsky and his comrades had defended Marxism and founded the Fourth International in 1938.

Schwarz then dealt with the various tendencies that turned away from the Fourth International under the ideological pressures of the post-war period. The central question was always that they did not understand the

defeats of the working class as being the result of the policies of their leadership, but as evidence of the organic inability of the working class to carry out the revolution.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) has defended historical materialism and the Marxist view of the proletariat as a revolutionary subject and today embodies contemporary Marxism, Schwarz explained.

The Marxist perspective of the Fourth International was highly relevant today, Schwarz concluded in the last part of his presentation. Citing formidable statistics, he showed that social inequality is greater than ever. Referring to President Donald Trump, who had cancelled the nuclear deal with Iran the day before, Schwarz said, “You cannot understand Trump if you seek the motives and brutal forms of his politics in his person.” Rather, Trump was an expression of the deep crisis and the political and moral decline of capitalism in the US and internationally. In Europe and Germany too, militarism is returning, and the class struggle is sharpening.

“Our primary task now is to systematically, consciously and aggressively build a revolutionary leadership. It is on this task that a progressive resolution to the basic question facing mankind—socialism or barbarism—depends,” Schwarz quoted from the end of a WSWs perspective.

The audience, who followed the lecture attentively, asked many questions afterwards. Social inequality was as much a theme as the concept of the “modern proletariat” or the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” the exploitation of workers in countries such as India, and Trotsky’s assessment of the First World War.

Schwarz answered further questions, and members of the IYSSE also participated in the discussion, which continued after the formal end of the event. Philipp Frisch said that the most important conclusion from the lecture and the discussion was to become active and build a revolutionary leadership in the working class. Everyone present should make the decision to become an active member of the IYSSE.

In the days before the meeting, members of the IYSSE had advertised the event with posters and flyers at the Ruhr University. The discussions with hundreds of students and workers during the campaign revolved around the growing crisis of capitalism and the great significance of Marxism that results directly from this.

Both the present gulf between rich and poor, which is historically unprecedented, as well as the growing danger of war, are perceived as serious problems by students both in Germany and abroad. Many expressed their opposition,

not only to the predatory wars of US imperialism but also to the German government, which decided to double its military spending in the coalition agreement and wants to spend any budget surpluses on the military and imperialist geopolitics. The discussions also revealed the widespread view that none of the parliamentary parties will seriously and vehemently oppose this policy.

The vast majority of students at the Ruhr University rejects arms sales and the massive rearmament of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces). Students showed great interest in the fundamental analysis of the Fourth International that the policy of war as well as austerity in Europe and around the world are the result of the contradictions of the capitalist system.

The discussions following the event also revolved around these questions. Many participants were impressed by the meeting and left their contact details. “The lecture was very interesting and very informative,” Yanik and Calvin, two young workers from Bochum, said. Both had learned about the event from the WSWs. “The alternation of history and Marx quotes and speaking about the current situation was very interesting. The title of the event is also very appropriate.”

Yanik is a geriatric nurse and very well acquainted with the extreme problems in this area. The increasing privatization of the health and social care system has created difficult to unbearable conditions for both those being cared for and those working in this field, he said.

Calvin had also worked as a geriatric nurse until recently but stopped because he found the conditions unbearable. He is now trying to find a new job.

The problems the talk dealt with had “actually existed for 200 years,” Yanik said. The growth of wars “in Iraq, in Syria and other countries, as well as the increase of conflicts that could lead to a world war” are particularly threatening he added.

“The lecture was an eye-opener and a call to become active and do something,” the two concluded.



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