

Lessons of 1933 and the fight against fascism today

Successful start for IYSSE election campaign at Berlin's Humboldt University

Our reporters
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On January 9, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Humboldt University in Berlin held the first meeting in its campaign for this year's student parliament election. Some 60 students attended the meeting, titled "Lessons of 1933 and the Fight Against Fascism Today."

Sven Wurm, IYSSE spokesman at Humboldt University (HU) and one of six IYSSE candidates, began by explaining why the youth organization of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) was putting the fight against fascism and discussion of the lessons of history at the center of its election campaign. While the vast majority of the population rejects the politics of neo-fascism, he said, right-wing extremists throughout the world and in Germany have been strengthened.

This has become particularly clear at HU in recent years. After students criticized Professor Jörg Baberowski's right-wing extremist positions (e.g., questioning Hitler's cruelty and agitating against refugees), the university administration defended the professor and threatened the students who spoke out against him.

Meanwhile, at the behest of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), Humboldt President Sabine Kunst of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) is suing the student body in an effort to force publication of a comprehensive list of students active in the RefRat, as the student administration at HU is known. Baberowski himself has incited his fascist followers to attack left-wing student events.

"Under these conditions, it is crucial to deal with the lessons of history in this country and discuss why the fight against war and fascism today once again requires

a socialist perspective," Wurm said. That was why the IYSSE had invited the editor of the German edition of the *World Socialist Web Site*, Johannes Stern, to speak on these issues.

Stern pointed out in his remarks that today, as before, there is a close connection between the rise of extreme right-wing forces and the capitalist crisis. It was only in the wake of the Great Depression that began in 1929 and the mass impoverishment of the petty-bourgeoisie that the Nazi Party could become a mass party.

Nevertheless, Hitler had not been able to bring the majority of voters behind him. He was brought to power in January 1933 by a state conspiracy led by former Chancellor Franz von Papen and President Paul von Hindenburg. Then, on March 24, 1933, all of the bourgeois parties in the Reichstag voted in favor of the Enabling Act, which sanctioned the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship.

Stern went into the political and social foundations of German fascism. German finance capital and big industry had handed power to Hitler and the National Socialists to crush the resistance of the working class and prevent a social revolution. He quoted from Leon Trotsky's essay *What is National Socialism?:* "Reducing the program of petty-bourgeois illusions to a naked bureaucratic masquerade, National Socialism raises itself over the nation as the worst form of imperialism ... The true historic mission of the fascistic dictatorship means preparation for war."

Based on Trotsky's other writings on Germany, Stern explained how the conspiracy to hand power over to the Nazis, despite the great resistance in the working class, had prevailed. Hitler's victory had been "the shame of the workers' leaders." Thus, after its historic betrayal

in 1914 in voting for war credits and its open counterrevolutionary role in the November Revolution of 1918/1919, the SPD had defended the capitalist Weimar Republic and feared a socialist revolution more than National Socialism.

The task of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was to mobilize social democratic workers for a common fight with the KPD against Hitler. But the “thoroughly wrong” policy of the already Stalinized KPD prevented this. The KPD chose a zig-zagging course, wavering between the ultra-left theory of “social fascism” and nationalist adaptation to the fascists in the so-called “Red Referendum.” This ultimately repelled the social democratic workers and torpedoed Trotsky’s proposal for a workers’ united front against fascism.

“The lesson of 1933,” explained Stern, “that the danger of fascism can be fought only by the independent mobilization of the working class against capitalism and its political defenders is decisive.” In contrast to the 1930s, fascism today is not yet a mass movement, but as in the past, the return of the ruling elites to militarism can be achieved only by dictatorial means against the great opposition of the population. “That is why all the bourgeois parties—from the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and SPD to the Left Party and the Greens—are taking over the AfD’s right-wing and nationalist program and are already working closely behind the scenes with the far-right party.”

At the end of his remarks, Stern emphasized that the same contradictions that give rise to imperialist war and fascism produce a return of the class struggle. He cited as examples the US teachers’ strikes last year, the continuing mass protests of the “yellow vests” in France, and, most recently, the two-day general strike of more than 200 million workers in India. He noted the spread in Germany of protests and strikes against low wages, poor working conditions, the police-state laws of regional governments and the rise of the AfD.

“The IYSSE and the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting to arm the growing opposition among workers and young people with a socialist program,” Stern said. He quoted from the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) program for the European elections: “We are not trying to alleviate the symptoms of a diseased

system, but instead advocating the overthrow of capitalism ... Only if the working class across Europe joins together and fights for the United Socialist States of Europe can a catastrophe be prevented.”

There was a strong response to the lecture, and a very serious and lively discussion arose on issues of history, politics and the socialist perspective of the Fourth International. Right-wing activities at HU and the work of the IYSSE on campus were also discussed. One participant asked what more could be done in addition to voting for the IYSSE candidates on January 23-24.

Wurm responded that anyone could support the election campaign of the IYSSE and also make a conscious decision to become a member and join the fight for socialism. “Humanity once again faces the alternative of socialism or barbarism and the Fourth International is the only authentic representative of socialism today,” he said.

Many students registered as contacts and signed up to participate in the struggle and support the campaign of the IYSSE.

The next event will take place on January 16, under the title “Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht: The First Fascist Murders in Germany.”



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