

# Final IYSSE election meeting at Humboldt University in Berlin

## How can the rise of the far-right be stopped?

**Our reporters**  
**24 January 2019**

More than 50 students and young workers participated Tuesday in the final meeting in the campaign of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) for the student parliament election at Humboldt University in Berlin. Wednesday was the last day for students to cast their vote for the socialists, who are on the ballot as List 5.

The meeting was titled “Socialism or barbarism: How can the rise of the far-right be stopped?” It began with a speech on this question by Christoph Vandreier, the author of the book *Why are They Back?* and deputy leader of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party–SGP).

Vandreier began his speech by noting that the rise of right-wing extremist tendencies is not limited to Germany, but is an international phenomenon. In the United States, Trump is an unrestrained nationalist and is using the government shutdown to move toward a dictatorial regime. In Italy and Austria, right-wing extremists and fascists are in government.

In recent days, Italy’s interior minister in a single decree declared 125,000 people to be illegally in the country and gave the go-ahead for their mass deportation. Such are the criminal policies that are responsible for nothing short of mass murder in the Mediterranean, said Vandreier.

It is no exaggeration to speak of capitalist barbarism, he stressed, pointing out that “Last weekend alone, 170 people died in the Mediterranean due to inadequate rescue services.”

He went on to explain that in Germany, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) was being strengthened in order to impose a right-wing agenda of military rearmament, social cutbacks and dictatorial measures. In the army, the police and intelligence agencies, right-wing extremist networks were active, he added. They were well known, tolerated and intentionally downplayed by the media.

“The collusion between right-wing extremists and the establishment has been on full display here at Humboldt University,” he continued. “Right-wing extremists tear down our placards, attack students who put them up, and try to disrupt our meetings. The university administration continues to back these forces and is taking joint action with them against the Student Council and threatening student critics.”

He stressed that the rise of the far-right was rooted in the historic crisis of capitalism, and that a struggle against fascism therefore had to involve a struggle against the capitalist system. “The same contradictions that led to the barbarism of the 20th century are erupting today once again: social inequality, nationalism and imperialism,” Vandreier said.

He cited the recently published Oxfam report, which found that the wealth of the world’s billionaires grew last year by €900 billion, or 12 percent. The poorest half of humanity, some 3.8 billion people, suffered a decline of 11 percent in their wealth over the same period.

This rapid growth of social inequality is destroying the foundations of all democratic structures, he said. Bourgeois rule is no longer compatible with democracy, which is why the right-wing extremists are being encouraged from above.

However, there is a mounting counteroffensive, Vandreier pointed out. The growth of strikes and workers’ struggles in numerous countries, the Yellow Vest protests in France and other social protests were clear signs of the return of major class battles. Everything now depended on the construction of a revolutionary socialist leadership in the working class.

This requires a relentless political struggle against those who call themselves lefts but pursue right-wing policies. The role of such pseudo-left forces is to suppress every working-class movement, he stated.

Vandreier detailed the role played by Syriza in Greece, which, in coalition with the right-wing extremist Independent Greeks, imposed much deeper austerity than its conservative and social democratic predecessors managed to impose. In Berlin, added Vandreier, the Left Party imposed more brutal cuts in alliance with the Social Democratic Party than any other German state government.

Vandreier concluded by saying: “We explicitly declare that it is possible to oppose the far-right only if we criticize those in the Left Party responsible for fostering the growth of the far-right, and thereby enable the workers to conduct an independent struggle.”

Sven Wurm, spokesman for the IYSSE and a candidate for the student parliament, began his remarks by stating that at

Humboldt University all the major political conflicts and questions were present in a concentrated form: the resurrection of right-wing ideology and the justifications for imperialist great power politics and authoritarian forms of rule.

He vividly detailed the IYSSE's political struggle at HU over the past five years, which began with the question of "whether the universities would remain centres of scholarship and the free exchange of ideas, or become, as they have previously in German history, state-directed training camps for militarist and right-wing ideologies?"

He continued: "When Professor Herfried Münkler declared that it was wrong to hold Germany responsible for the crimes in World War I and the barbaric Nazi terror in World War II, and when Jörg Baberowski told *Der Spiegel*, 'Hitler was not a psychopath, he was not vicious,' and defended the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte, all that was heard from the professoriate was a deafening silence."

When the IYSSE campaigned against this, Wurm continued, they came under attack from the university administration. Three years ago, Sabine Kunst, the former universities minister in Brandenburg, was hired as HU president to defend Baberowski and push ahead with the university's transformation into a right-wing militarist think tank.

Wurm explained how the IYSSE managed to develop resistance among students. It was necessary to repeatedly emphasise that the falsifications of history were directly connected with the federal government's right-wing policies and the return of German militarism, he said.

Over the past week, the student parliament voted overwhelmingly in favour of the resignation of the HU presidium, composed of Kunst and Ludwig Kronthaler. That was an important step forward, Wurm declared.

He posed the question, "Why were we able to explain these issues so clearly at such an early stage? Why are we the only ones who explain the events at HU within their broader political context and mobilise opposition against them?"

It is "not merely because we are especially engaged with the task," he said. "Of course we are. But the real reason is our approach to political questions. We are the student and youth movement of the International Committee of the Fourth International. We are Trotskyists and base our work on the scientific foundation of Marxism."

The third speech was attentively followed by the audience. Genevieve Leigh, a leading member of the IYSSE in the United States, spoke via livestream. She detailed the situation in the United States and reported that anger and disgust with Trump's attacks on refugees and immigrants is continually growing.

"But what is the character of the so-called opposition?" she asked. The Democrats are obsessively focused on provoking a war with Russia. They have been transformed into an organisation of warmongers, she said.

"In the same way that the grand coalition of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and Social

Democratic Party in Germany has paved the way for the AfD's rise and adopted its policies, the Democrats in the US are Trump's trailblazers," she said. Trump is one expression of a deeply dysfunctional society in the US, and the Democrats are another.

It is very important for workers and young people in Europe to understand that there are two Americas, stated Leigh. "On the one side is the America of the rich with their bombs and missiles, and on the other there is the America of the working class, the vast majority of the population, which has no interest in war and global surveillance by the NSA, but fights for peace and social equality."

Leigh then explained how the teachers' strikes had spread across the US, and how the IYSSE had intervened in many cities to fight for a socialist and internationalist program.

She reported that the IYSSE in Michigan was directly involved in preparing a workers' meeting in early December at which a resolution was passed to oppose layoffs and plant shutdowns at General Motors by forming independent rank-and-file action committees.

In conclusion, she noted, "Political education is the most important thing for all young people and students around the world who want to fight for socialism and against war and reaction." The historical lessons contained in the Trotskyist movement in particular have to be studied, she continued. The IYSSE in the US therefore combines its interventions on university campuses and at factories with a study of the history of the Fourth International.

All of the speeches evoked great interest and lively discussion.

IYSSE reporters spoke with participants after the meeting. Max, who works for a commercial firm, thought the meeting was very informative. He said, "I thought the speeches were very clarifying. I don't study at HU, but I was made aware of the meeting by my sister, who I'm here with today. And I must say that after the speeches, I find the IYSSE's good work is very appealing."



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**