

Successful book presentation of *Why Are They Back?* at the Heinrich Böll Library in Berlin

Our reporter
30 May 2019

Last Thursday, Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) Deputy National Secretary Christoph Vandreier presented his book, *Why Are They Back? Historical falsification, political conspiracy and the return of fascism in Germany*, at the Heinrich Böll Library in Berlin-Prenzlauerberg. (The English edition of the book and can be ordered in the US and UK.)

Almost 50 participants from Pankow, Weissensee and the surrounding area listened intently to the author's remarks. A few weeks ago, Vandreier returned from a lecture tour in the US, where students and workers responded with great interest to the socialist perspective against war and fascism that is outlined in the book.

"The return of fascism, of authoritarian rule, of dictatorship and war is an international phenomenon," stressed Vandreier at the beginning of the meeting. "We are currently experiencing the rightward shift of the entire political establishment. This shift to the right does not come from below, but from above." Developments in Europe showed that the contending forces were not right-wing extremists against "democrats," but that all sections of the ruling class were pursuing reactionary policies.

"In France, President Emmanuel Macron glorifies Nazi collaborator Philippe Pétain and uses the army against demonstrating yellow vests. In Germany, the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats is building a comprehensive system of deportation prisons and is brutally detaining and harassing people who are guilty of nothing, before they are deported to war zones."

Based on detailed quotations from the book, Vandreier then described the significant role played by the universities in this development. He focused on the militaristic positions of Humboldt Professor Herfried

Münker and the right-wing extremist tirades of his colleague Jörg Baberowski, who in 2014 had told newsweekly *Der Spiegel*, "Hitler was not cruel."

"What was even more significant than these positions were the responses at the university and in the media," Vandreier explained. "No one objected to these attempts to relativize Nazi crimes and make right-wing views acceptable. Instead, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and SGP were attacked for criticizing them." Vandreier explained how the media, academics and establishment politicians had prepared the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and other extreme right-wing forces.

The reading was a success, culminating in a lively debate that also expressed the deep concerns of those present. An older participant was appalled by the fact that for years, not a single professor at Humboldt University had opposed the unprecedented falsification of history, and asked what this said about the state of the historical sciences.

One student asked if, in addition to Münker and Baberowski, other professors with similar anti-democratic attitudes were known at other universities in Germany. He was shocked to learn that such and similar views are expressed and encouraged at numerous universities.

One participant asked if "cruelty" was a suitable category for adequately classifying Hitler's psyche and the emergence of fascism. A social worker present said, "I work very closely with members of the Sinti in my profession and can very vividly imagine how appalled many of the older people would be if someone told them that Hitler was not cruel."

Several participants spoke vehemently against the trivialization of Nazi crimes by Professor Jörg Baberowski, and recalled the horrors of the World War

and the machinery of annihilation of the Holocaust. Against the background of increasing danger of war in Iran, Syria and Venezuela, these positions gained even more urgency.

The book presentation delivered a strong political message. “We say that the classic Marxist conceptions are of burning actuality again,” Vandreier explained.

“In logistics, in the automotive industry, in social care and in the digital service sector, people are beginning to defend themselves. They are objectively linked together across national borders. At the same time, they are confronted with powerful international corporations and extremely hostile governments. The class struggle is returning. The ruling class is preparing for this by reviving its criminal traditions of war and dictatorship. We, the working class, must also prepare and revive our revolutionary traditions.”

Katharina Kaden, who had organized the reading for the Heinrich Böll Library, thanked Vandreier for “the interesting and exciting evening” and expressed her hope that the subsequent discussion had encouraged those present “to engage even more intensively with this important topic!” Another participant later wrote on Facebook, “If I had not been there, I would have missed something important ... it was great.”



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