Greetings from the ICFI to the SEP (Australia) 2022 Congress

The return of German militarism and the perspective of international socialism

1 November 2022

These remarks were delivered by Christoph Vandreier to the Sixth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), held from September 24 to 27, 2022.

Vandreier is the national secretary of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP), the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

I am very pleased to bring to this Congress the revolutionary greetings of the Socialist Equality Party in Germany.

Comrade Cheryl rightly located the Congress at the very beginning in the fifth phase of the development of the Trotskyist movement. This phase is characterized, as David North explained three years ago, by the intersection of the growing workers' struggles with our historical principles and the crucial importance of our party's interventions.

This is especially true of our understanding of imperialism and our assessment of the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union and the character of the Putin regime. We are the only political tendency on this planet that opposes the development of World War III and the nuclear annihilation of mankind with a progressive perspective based on these historical principles.

As you write in the War Resolution, the escalation of the Ukrainian war makes clear that there is no way out of the confrontation of the Third World War within the rotten nation-state system of capitalism. Only the international unity of the working class can prevent a catastrophe and only if it is led by our party. That is why your congress is of such great importance.

The war against Russia is being pushed to the extreme by all imperialist powers, while at the same time they are waging war against their own working class. In doing so, they themselves are acting not from a position of strength, but from desperation. They are sitting on a social powder keg.

In Germany, this is taking on particularly aggressive forms. Seventy seven years after the end of World War II and the horror of the Holocaust, German tanks are again rolling against Russia. They are built by the same arms corporations that enriched themselves from the concentration camps and supplied Hitler's Wehrmacht with weapons.

German elites are using the Ukrainian war to launch the biggest rearmament since Hitler and once again make Germany the continent's biggest military power.

In a landmark foreign policy speech on September 12, Lambrecht declared that Germany must play a leading role not only economically and politically, but also militarily: "Germany's size, its geographic location, its economic power, in short, its weight, make us a leading power, whether we like it or not. In military terms, too."

In regard to the very real danger of a nuclear war as a result of NATO aggression, Lambrecht declared that Putin's "reaction to Ukraine's successes only encourages us to continue supporting Ukraine."

Chancellor Scholz also stated the goal of a total military defeat of Russia and pushing ahead with rearmament far beyond the tripling of the arms budget that has already been approved, in order to assert German interests militarily throughout the world. In August, the German Air Force was already involved in two military exercises in Australia rehearsing war against China.

The cost of this madness is being imposed on the working class. The ruling class is using the war for a general attack on the working class and the smashing of the last remnants of the social security systems. In Germany, the entire federal budget is being cut by 20 percent. The health budget alone is being slashed from 64 to 22 billion euros in the midst of the pandemic.

While banks and corporations receive tens of billions of euros in taxpayers' money, tens of thousands of jobs are being destroyed. Horrendous inflation in energy and food decimates wages for the entire working class. Government, corporations and unions are working together in concerted action to prevent any compensation for this wage robbery. With the return of German militarism, the German Labor

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Front also returns.

The aggressiveness with which the ruling class is pushing the confrontation with Russia is shown by the effects of the sanctions policy on the German economy. The halt to cheap gas from Russia threatens entire industries in Germany. According to surveys, 90 percent of companies see the astronomical gas prices as a major or even existential threat. Already, entire factories are closing, perhaps never to reopen.

As in the 1930s, there will be a switch to a wartime economy and trade relations will be restricted according to the needs of the war. The current renunciation of Russian gas only means all the greater efforts to appropriate these resources militarily. “Attempts to save economic life by inoculating it with virus from the corpse of nationalism result in blood poisoning which bears the name of fascism,” Trotsky explained in 1934.

In Germany and all over Europe, authoritarian and fascist forces are being deliberately promoted in order to push through war policies and social attacks. In Italy, all parties are preparing for Meloni’s fascists to take over the government after next Sunday's election. In Sweden, too, the far-right could be integrated into the government.

In Germany, the traffic light coalition is putting the program of the radical right AfD into practice in its pandemic policy, rearmament and social attacks. In the police, army and intelligence services, right-wing terrorist cells are being covered up and built up by the highest authorities. They are being positioned against anyone who opposes the war policy and social devastation.

That is why our party has been caught in the crosshairs of these networks. The government and intelligence services want to declare us illegal because we are at the forefront of the struggle against militarism.

The government justified naming the SGP explicitly because we agitated against nationalism and militarism and argued for an egalitarian, democratic and socialist society. It developed the argument that declared any criticism of the state organs, and especially of the army and the secret service, is anti-constitutional and illegal. Two courts have since blessed this scandalous revival of the Nazis’ Gesinnungsjustiz, which is why we have now filed a constitutional complaint.

Our complaint is not a defensive act and is certainly not based on illusions in the Federal Constitutional Court. Rather, with our complaint, we are going on the offensive and putting the Verfassungsschutz on trial. We put ourselves at the forefront of the struggle against the radical right-wing conspiracy in the state apparatus and the return of fascist methods.

We are indeed the only political tendency that opposes the war and social devastation with a progressive perspective. The Greens have become the most aggressive warmongers in Germany. Not a day goes by when they do not call for further arms deliveries and an escalation of the war against Russia and China.

The Left Party also has both feet in the war camp. It supports the economic war against Russia and itself implements the social attacks on workers. When figures like Sahra Wagenknecht criticize the sanctions against Russia, they do so from a German-national standpoint.

The unions play a central role in pushing through the war policies, plant closures and wage theft against the workers. Germany’s largest union, IG Metall, threw its weight behind the war course right at the beginning, openly declaring that inflation should not be offset by higher wages.

Enormous resistance is developing against this phalanx of government, corporations and unions. Metalworkers, nurses, pilots and many other sections of the working class are on strike and in struggle, seeking ways to escape the straitjacket of the unions. The struggles are taking more and more openly international forms, as can be seen, for example, in the struggle of the Ford workers of Saarlouis and Valencia.

Our intervention in these struggles is now gaining crucial importance. “The IWA-RFC is the concrete form for the unification of the international working class,” as you write in your resolution.

Our historical principles and experiences are now intersecting with the experiences of the working class and we must provide leadership. The campaign of Will Lehman shows this impressively. We must connect the struggles of the working class with the fight against war and build an international movement against imperialism in the working class. The future of mankind rests upon the building of our world party and the discussions at this congress will be very important in this.

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