IYSSE holds successful anti-war meetings in Munich, Bochum and Frankfurt

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16 May 2023

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) continued its series of anti-war meetings holding three more successful meetings in Munich, Bochum and Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Under the title "The war in Ukraine and how to stop it," the youth and student movement of the Fourth International shed light on the historical, economic and political causes of the war and presented an international socialist strategy to end it.

Around the world, IYSSE anti-war meetings have already taken place in the United States, Australia and New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Canada, Brazil and Britain. Speakers from Russia and Ukraine participated in several of the meetings with a joint statement. In Germany, the series began on April 27 in Berlin, and will continue on May 17 in Stuttgart and May 26 in Leipzig.

In the run-up to the meetings, IYSSE members distributed thousands of flyers at universities and in city centres, put up posters and spoke about the current threat of war to hundreds of students attending numerous lectures. They characterized the Russian military's invasion of Ukraine as a reactionary response by the nationalist Putin regime to decades of imperialist provocations by the NATO states.

The IYSSE explained that, like the Putin regime, the Zelensky government represents the interests of the post-Soviet national oligarchy, not the working class. At the behest of the imperialist NATO powers, it was waging a catastrophic war that had already cost hundreds of thousands of lives and called into question the survival of human civilization.

With their imperialist pro-war policies, the IYSSE said, the United States, Germany and the other NATO powers were pursuing long-held goals and great-power plans. "The world is closer to an all-out conflict between nuclear powers than at any time since the 1960s," the IYSSE warned students attending the lectures.

Measures were taken at all three meetings to protect against the coronavirus. To this end, Far-UV lights and air filters were set up and free FFP2 masks distributed to all attendees.

Despite considerable attempts to prevent public discussion of the war, all events were a resounding success. At the Ruhr University in Bochum, unknown persons had systematically destroyed IYSSE posters and pasted over them slogans such as "Russian propaganda." In Frankfurt, a few days earlier, the owners of the venue had even threatened to illegally cancel the meeting.

The IYSSE reacted with a political counteroffensive, so that several dozen people took part in each of the three events. The two meetings at Ruhr-Uni-Bochum and Goethe-University Frankfurt in particular, which took place directly on the university campus, were met with a strong response among young people and students.

At the meetings, speakers examined the war through six key aspects essential to understanding it:

• The conflict can only be understood in the context of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

• The war is a continuation of a three-decades-long and expanding war of the imperialist powers.

• The Russian invasion of Ukraine was the reactionary response of the Russian oligarchy to decades of imperialist encirclement.

• The propaganda about a struggle for "freedom" and "democracy" is contradicted by the strengthening of far-right and fascist forces in Ukraine.

• The ruling class in Germany, which had already tried to annex Ukraine and subjugate Russia in two world wars, is using the conflict to implement long-cherished militarization plans.

• The war cannot be understood in isolation from the deepening economic, social, and political crisis of the great capitalist powers.

Bochum

About 30 students and workers attended the meeting in Bochum, many thanking Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) chairman Christoph Vandreier for the lecture and joining in the discussion. One student raised the question of whether there was really a direct link between the Western states' arms build-up for war and cuts in wages and social spending. IYSSE members responded that all the major capitalist powers were moving toward a third world war, trying to deflect domestic social contradictions outward through war. The international working class, which had no interest in a world war, was to be made to pay for this according to the will of the ruling class in each country.

This was followed by another participant asking whether

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human nature made war and fascism inevitable. In reply, it was explained that early forms of war were historically linked to the rise of social inequality. In the 1930s, Hitler had been able to draw on a large following among the petty bourgeoisie, but amid a crisis in his party, he was ultimately propelled to power by a conspiracy within the German elites.

As Vandreier explained, under Stalin's influence, the German Communist Party (KPD) rejected a joint struggle between workers supporting the KPD and SPD. For its part, the SPD defended the bourgeois state and "legality" amid the fascist terror. Trotsky had fought for the tactic of a united front of both workers' parties, which still had a majority against Hitler's NSDAP (Nazi Party) in 1933.

The event was able to go on longer than the IYSSE had originally estimated, and the lively discussion did not have to end prematurely.

Munich

The Munich meeting on May 4 was chaired by IYSSE member Clemens, who emphasized the internationalist principles of the youth organization and pointed to the mass struggles of the working class in France, Sri Lanka, Britain and the United States: "The same driving forces that drive the capitalist class to war externally and massive state rearmament, repression, social cuts and austerity internally also lead to an international resurgence of class struggle. It is into these struggles that we intervene with our socialist program."

Speaker Peter Schwarz, secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International and *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board member, began his talk by quoting from the infamous October 1914 appeal "To the Cultural World!" in which leading German academics justified and whitewashed the Kaiser's war campaign.

The propaganda of the time about "Germany's pure cause" and "women and children slaughtered by Russian hordes" resembled today's narratives, showing "that the first casualty of any war is the truth." Schwarz continued, "There is no other event that stirs up society, demands such sacrifices from people, as war. That is why propaganda and lies were indispensable weapons for the belligerents.

"Nothing—from either side—can be taken at face value," Schwarz concluded. He said NATO was doing everything in its power to add fuel to the fire of this war with arms deliveries worth tens of billions of euros. Moreover, it was boycotting any diplomatic solution and converting society in its own countries to a war economy.

In view of the omnipresent warmongering, one participant in the discussion raised the question of the extent to which earlier capitalist politicians such as Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (Social Democratic Party, SPD) had been more "reasonable" than current generations of politicians. To this, Schwarz replied that the phase of the relatively stable post-war capitalist system was finally over. The lack of "reason" among government politicians, he said, was an expression of the historical bankruptcy of capitalism, which once again confronted the working class with the alternative of "socialism or barbarism."

Referring to the reactionary role of the trade-union bureaucracy in the wage disputes at Deutsche Post and in the public sector, Schwarz declared that the most important task was to build a new, revolutionary and international leadership in the working class that would fight for a socialist program.

Frankfurt

In Frankfurt am Main, the meeting was able to take place as planned in the large hall of the Evangelische Studierendengemeinde (ESG) on the Westend campus after the IYSSE waged a public campaign against attempts to censor their event. Chairing the meeting, Tamino Dreisam drew a comparison between the murderous war in Ukraine and the mass deaths in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In both cases, he said, the ruling class showed its inability to collaborate internationally and its determination to walk over dead bodies in pursuing the profit interests of the oligarchs.

The meeting was attended by several Ukrainian nationalists, representatives of Stalinist student groups and supporters of the post-modernist Frankfurt School, whose reactionary positions were clearly responded to in the course of the meeting. As speaker Christoph Vandreier explained, socialists fight for the unification of the international working class and reject the defence of nation states.

This applied, he said, both to the Ukrainian state of the Kiev government and to the eastern Ukrainian "people's republics" of the Russian-backed separatists. What was needed, he said, was fraternization between Ukrainian and Russian workers, who must turn their weapons not against each other but toward their generals and capitalist elites in their respective countries.

This principle, according to which "the main enemy is at home," also guided the work of internationalists in Europe and the United States, Vandreier explained. Such an orientation toward the working class, he said, was not only "realistic" but the only way to permanently end the conflict by eliminating its roots in the capitalist competition among nation states.

Discussions continued for a long time at the book tables following all the meetings. Many students gave their contact details to the IYSSE to participate in building an international anti-war movement.

The IYSSE's international series of events will continue in Germany with public meetings in Stuttgart (May 17, 6 p.m.) and Leipzig (May 26, 6 p.m.).

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