

“No third world war! Stop the rearmament!”: IYSSE holds successful student election event at Berlin’s Humboldt University

Humboldt University IYSSE
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Under the title “No third world war! Stop the rearmament!” the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a meeting at Berlin’s Humboldt University on Monday to kick off its election campaign for the Student Parliament (StuPa). The IYSSE is advancing a socialist programme against war and is standing five candidates in the elections, which take place on July 4.

Candidate Gregor Kahl pointed out that the IYSSE, as a youth and student organisation of the Fourth International, was fighting all over the world to build a mass movement of youth and workers against war. He said the IYSSE StuPa election campaign at Humboldt University—a central institution of German militarism—now gains the greatest political significance under the conditions of the escalating Ukraine war.

“Our meeting takes place in a situation where the danger of a nuclear war between Russia and the imperialist NATO powers grows every day. Hundreds of thousands have already died in Ukraine, with no end in sight. In the last few days alone, tens of thousands have been killed in the course of the Ukrainian military’s ‘spring offensive.’ Now, NATO countries are preparing a further escalation to defeat the Russian military on the backs of the Ukrainian people.”

In his presentation, Johannes Stern, editor-in-chief of the German-language edition of the *World Socialist Web Site*, elaborated on these issues, explaining the historical, economic and political background to the war, and developing an international socialist perspective on this basis to stop it.

First, Stern stressed that the IYSSE and its parent organisation, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party), and the International Committee of the Fourth International had condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine from the beginning. On February 24, 2022, for example, the WSWs had issued a statement titled “Oppose the Putin government’s invasion of Ukraine and US-NATO warmongering! For the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers!”

“Putin’s invasion is reactionary and serves the interests of the ruling oligarchy in Russia, which emerged from the restoration of capitalism,” Stern declared. “We oppose it, but from a left socialist standpoint, not a right-wing pro-imperialist standpoint. It is becoming increasingly clear that the NATO powers provoked the Russian invasion in order to unleash an all-out war against

Russia.”

Stern cited reports and testimony from the front that vividly described the mass deaths in the “spring offensive” and drew a parallel with the First World War. As then, governments and military brass showed a complete indifference to human life. It was estimated that about 1,000 Ukrainian soldiers are already dying on the front lines every day. But instead of stopping the offensive, the NATO powers had responded to the debacle with further escalation.

“What is the next red line that NATO will cross in Ukraine?” asked Stern, warning that several possibilities were conceivable. “The establishment of a no-fly zone, the deployment of NATO troops and the deployment or even use of tactical nuclear weapons by NATO to avert a Russian victory.” Drawing on statements by leading NATO representatives and strategic documents of the military alliance, Stern demonstrated that all these options were already being concretely discussed and prepared behind closed doors.

In order to avert a catastrophe and build a conscious anti-war movement, a clear Marxist understanding of the causes and background of the development of war was necessary, Stern argued. First, the connection between capitalism and war must be understood, he said.

Stern quoted from the 2016 ICFI statement “Socialism and the Fight Against War”:

The essential cause of militarism and war lies in the deep-seated contradictions of the world capitalist system: 1) between a globally integrated and interdependent economy and its division into antagonistic national states; and 2) between the socialized character of global production and its subordination, through the private ownership of the means of production, to the accumulation of private profit by the ruling capitalist class.

Stern then placed the proxy war being waged by the NATO powers in Ukraine against Russia in the context of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO’s more than 30-year war campaign led by the US, its eastward expansion and the return of German

militarism. “As in previous wars, the Ukrainian war is not about ‘democracy,’ ‘freedom’ or ‘human rights,’ but about capitalist interests,” Stern said. The aim of the imperialist powers, he said, was to tie Ukraine to the NATO powers and subjugate Russia economically and politically.

“In reality, the war had already started in 2014 with the right-wing coup in Kiev.” Stern explained: “At that time, Washington and Berlin intervened in Ukraine to overthrow a government that was more Russia-oriented and unwilling to accept the terms of the Association Agreement with the European Union. To organise this coup, they worked with openly far-right and fascist forces, which have since been massively strengthened.”

In this context, the coup in Ukraine had been “part of a truly fundamental change in German foreign policy.” Stern referred to the 2014 Munich Security Conference, at which the German government, then a Grand Coalition of the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats, had announced that it would return to an aggressive foreign and great power policy.

Prior to that in 2013, leading politicians from all parties, journalists, academics, military officers and business representatives had developed a new foreign policy strategy under the auspices of the government-affiliated Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) under the title “New Power—New Responsibility,” which culminated in the demand that Germany must once again play a global leading role politically and militarily because, as a “trading and exporting nation,” it was dependent on “demand from other markets as well as access to international trade routes and raw materials” like hardly any other country.

The return of German militarism, which is now being pushed to extremes with the war against Russia, also has an ideological dimension, Stern continued. “At this university, professors have played down and continue to play down the crimes of German imperialism in the First and Second World Wars and even rehabilitate Hitler himself in preparation for new crimes.” Stern mentioned, among others, the Eastern European historian Jörg Baberowski, who in 2014 had described Hitler as “not vicious” in *Der Spiegel*, and the political scientist Herfried Münkler, who calls for Germany to once again become the “task master” of Europe as a “power in the middle [of Europe].”

At the end of his talk, Stern explained that the war in Ukraine was not a temporary phenomenon but had become an existential issue for all warring parties. The war had entered the “gravitational field of ‘total war’,” in which all aspects of social life were subordinated to the needs of making war. Germany’s most recently published National Security Strategy, from which Stern quoted at length, openly expressed this and was a blueprint for the concretely emerging development of a third world war.

“But the same capitalist contradictions that produce war also create the conditions for socialist revolution,” Stern concluded. “Throughout Europe and around the world, class struggles are developing and strikes and protests are increasing. What is crucial is the question of political orientation and perspective.” A central lesson of the 20th century, he said, was “that the struggle against imperialist war can only be waged successfully through the political mobilisation of the working class on the basis of an uncompromisingly anti-capitalist, socialist programme.” This, he

said, was the importance of the IYSSE’s election campaign.

There was a strong response to the lecture. One participant asked whether Russia and China could be described as imperialist. Stern firmly refuted this and elaborated on the historical development of both countries and the betrayal of the October Revolution by Stalinism and the restoration of capitalism. The designation of Russia and China as imperialist served to ideologically justify the war policy of the NATO powers, he explained.

Referring to the letter from a Russian Trotskyist to David North, the chairperson of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, Stern explained that unlike the imperialist powers, the capitalist regime in Russia was not concerned with the redivision of the world, but seeking a deal with the imperialists and the defence of the status quo.

To state this was neither a justification of the Russian regime’s war policy nor an accommodation to the capitalist oligarchy. Comrades of the IYSSE and the ICFI were active both in Ukraine and Russia, where they were waging a principled and independent political struggle at great risk to mobilise the working class against imperialism and the war policies of their respective governments, Stern explained.

Other IYSSE candidates also participated in the long and intense discussion, which included the right-wing pro-war stance of the official left. Christopher Khamis, who studies library and information science at Humboldt, emphasized in the discussion the importance of the IYSSE’s campaign to win youth and students to socialism and orient them to the growing working class movement. War cannot be stopped by diplomatic maneuvers or appeals to the rulers because it grows out of capitalism itself.

Khamis stressed, “The alleged ‘peace initiatives’ of capitalist governments like the Lula government in Brazil or the Ramaphosa government in South Africa are doomed to failure and are also aimed at fomenting illusions among workers and youth. The IYSSE is the only organization in the German capital that is organizing an event against the war development. Now we need your support.”

Kahl ended the event with a strong appeal to join the IYSSE and actively support the election campaign. The next event, “How the return of German militarism was prepared at Humboldt University,” will take place on June 26 at 6:30 p.m. More information can be found here.



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