

WSWS chairman David North addresses Sydney meeting

US election turmoil marks the onset of a revolutionary crisis

Our reporter
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At a public meeting in Sydney, Australia on Sunday, David North, chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* and national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in the US, declared that the United States election crisis signified the onset of a revolutionary crisis in the heartland of world capitalism, with incalculable global implications.

North warned that remarks made by Justice Antonin Scalia in the US Supreme Court last Friday, to the effect that the American people did not have the right of suffrage in the election of the president, raised the spectre of the infamous Dred Scott decision of 1857, which accelerated the processes that led to the American Civil War.

The Court was hearing an appeal by George W. Bush against a decision by the Florida Supreme Court to delay the certification of his election victory by Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris because tens of thousands of votes had not been properly counted. “In the course of adjudicating this case, Scalia is proposing to go far beyond a technical question to introduce and legitimise a profoundly anti-democratic interpretation of the American constitution,” North said.

How the Supreme Court eventually ruled, he declared, would reveal “how far the American ruling class is prepared to go in breaking with traditional bourgeois-democratic and constitutional norms”.

“Is it prepared to sanction ballot fraud and the suppression of votes and install into the White House a candidate who has attained that office through blatantly illegal and anti-democratic methods?” Whatever the outcome, the past three weeks had demonstrated, he said, “a dramatic erosion of support within the ruling elites for the traditional forms of bourgeois democracy

in the United States”.

North told the 150-strong gathering of workers, students, academics and professional people that the attitude of the majority of the American media was summed up by one columnist who said: “Yes, Gore probably got more votes, but who cares? He was mugged and the local cops don't care.”

“The *World Socialist Web Site* stands alone,” North said, “in identifying and clarifying the profound issues of democratic rights that are being raised in this election.”

In a wide-ranging and detailed address to the meeting, North presented a lengthy historical review of the events of the 1850s that led up to the Civil War. Prior to the 1860s, he argued, there was an “irrepressible conflict between slavery and free labour,” that “ultimately generated a complete breakdown of the political system”.

Could any analogy be drawn, he asked, between the crisis of pre-Civil War America, and the situation that existed today?

The most fundamental issue in the election campaign was the distribution of social wealth. Under conditions of the greatest social polarisation in the advanced capitalist world, the program of the Republican Party had become “the removal of all restraints—economic, political and social—on the exploitation of labour, the realisation of corporate profits and the accumulation of personal wealth.

“The present attack on the right to vote is only the inevitable political manifestation of the underlying tendency to systematically exclude the working class from any form of independent participation in political life.”

Under the weight of this enormous social contradiction, the political structures that had existed for the past 150 years were breaking apart.

North explained that, behind the political contradictions of the period prior to the Civil War, were colossal economic changes, including the emergence of industries, the railways and the telegraph, that strengthened the position of the industrial north.

Similarly, throughout the past 20 years, the United States had undergone an extraordinary transformation, with revolutionary new technologies accelerating the process of globalisation. This had led to immense changes in the social structure, the decline in the position of the traditional middle class, and the vast proletarianisation of American society.

It was no accident, North drew out, that “the Republican Party and its most rabid representatives all proclaim themselves the most vitriolic opponents of the process of globalisation. They all speak of a return to fortress America and attempt to turn back the clock to some imaginary United States insulated and isolated from the process of global change.”

Throughout the 20th century, it had been a basic article of faith of all those who denied the viability of Marxism, North said, that socialist revolution was impossible in the United States. The continued existence of world imperialism had depended on the strength and stability of American capitalism. But the election crisis had now called that into question.

Every government would be compelled to consider the implications of political events in the US, North insisted. The American crisis would reverberate around the world, effecting not only economic changes but shifts in the social psychology of masses of people, a crucial factor in the development of social revolution.

The meeting concluded with a lively question and answer session, covering many different aspects of the election crisis, and a collection that raised more than \$2,200 for the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The WSWS will publish the full text of David North's report, as well as a transcript of the questions and answers.



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