

WSWS Chairman David North addresses Berlin meeting on US war drive against Iraq

Our reporter

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On November 4 the *World Socialist Web Site* held a public meeting at Humboldt University in Berlin to discuss a political strategy to oppose war against Iraq. The well-attended meeting was addressed by David North, chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board and national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of the United States. His speech precipitated a lively and, at times, heated discussion.

North began by referring to the “tragic experience of the twentieth century”. He explained that while politicians and journalists were in the habit of reacting to immediate events in a very superficial way, ignoring broader political and historical events, “our approach to political events is not based on impressions which we draw from the newspapers or watching television on any given day. We base ourselves on our entire historical experience—in particular, the political lessons of the twentieth century.”

“What was the situation 100 years ago?” North asked. “Beneath the apparent prosperity and wealth of European civilisation, the contradictions of European imperialism were laying the foundations for the most colossal bloodbath in history. Without a profound insight into the laws of historical development, who could have imagined in the Berlin of 1902 or 1903 what was going to happen to this city and this country during the next 20 to 30 years?”

Only the leading Marxists of that time were in a position to provide a clear orientation, and they could do so only because they analysed daily events in their connection with historical development. “The world is moment and relation,” North continued. “All new developments contain within them, and are a manifestation of, a broader, more profound historical process. When we speak of a scientific perspective, we mean there is a real relationship between the concepts we develop in our mind and objective tendencies of development.”

He went on to explain that the strength of the socialist workers movement consists in its ability to develop a practice based on a correct understanding of the objective tendencies of socioeconomic development. On the other hand, the basic weakness of the bourgeoisie, the capitalist ruling class, as a social force consists in the fact that its subjective aims and class interests are in irresolvable contradiction to objective social development. This contradiction is expressed in the often

absurd, self-delusory notions that appear day in, day out in American newspapers and media commentaries.

North made clear that the war preparations of the Bush government and its attendant plans for world domination were guided by a fundamentally false interpretation of international political development since the collapse of the Soviet Union 12 years ago. The collapse of the Soviet Union did not augur a “victory in the Cold War,” but rather the return to the political agenda of all the unresolved problems of the twentieth century.

“Appearances are deceptive,” North stated. “The increasing reliance of American imperialism on military strength and its ruthless attitude towards its former allies is not a sign of strength and self-confidence, but of weakness and uncertainty.”

Confronted with growing economic problems, the ruling elite in Washington feels threatened by its international competitors and is employing its military power to maintain its dominance in world politics, North said. The current preparations for war play an important role in this respect.

The Bush government has no answer to the dramatic increase in domestic social tension and conflict. Its attempts to propagate patriotic sentiments have failed to win any considerable response amongst the majority of the American population. At the same time, the government employs the so-called “war against terror” as a vehicle for abolishing fundamental democratic rights.

Based on current statistics and social analyses, North presented a devastating portrayal of the social decline that has taken place in the US. At one pole of society a tiny elite has assembled hitherto unknown excesses of wealth, while living conditions for the great majority of the working population have become increasingly difficult, and for many millions of poor people, intolerable. The growing social tensions find no outlet, under conditions where the trade unions have completely betrayed the interests of the working class. A social explosion in the US is unavoidable.

“For years, the European left has underestimated American workers,” North said. The cowardly, submissive behaviour demonstrated by the German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer (Green Party), during his latest visit to Washington has its roots in such an underestimation of the internal contradictions and conflicts of American society, and therefore an overestimation

of the supposedly invincible power of the US government.

North continued: “As a socialist from the United States, allow me to emphasise what I regard as the most central point in the development of an anti-war movement. I imagine that many of you in this room listen and agree with much of what I say. But perhaps as you listen to me, you say: yes, this is all very true, but how can war be prevented? I imagine that you have few illusions in the so-called anti-war policy of German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, but the question arises, how can one stop war when America wants war? What social force exists that is capable of pursuing a policy that can stop war and defeat America imperialism?”

“A serious opposition against the war must turn to the working class. It must be based on the recognition that there exists in the United States a revolutionary force—the working class—irrespective of the existing political confusion. Whoever rejects this perspective cannot develop a genuine anti-war policy. You are either drawn into a position of complete hopelessness or illusions in the so-called anti-war capacities of the individual bourgeois leaderships.

“The second point which has to be stressed is implicit in the turn to the working class. The opposition to war has to be an international opposition. It should be a source of optimism for us all that even at an early stage of the crisis, there is a substantial opposition movement to war. The globalisation of production creates the objective conditions for the conscious internationalisation of the class struggle.

“In other words: what is necessary is an internationally coordinated movement by the working class against militarism and war, which directs its energies against the capitalist system and unites the issue of war with the great social questions. This is the programme which lies at the heart of our international movement.”

In the discussion that followed, a representative of the Iraqi Committee of Opposition accused the speaker of backing the Iraqi government and defending a regime that ruled through terror. He supported the US preparations for war and shouted that history had shown that “fascism can only be overcome by violence.”

North’s reply was strongly applauded. He said, “Our opposition to war does not mean that we support the politics of Saddam Hussein. But we are not prepared to contract out the struggle against Saddam Hussein to imperialism. Our political movement was opposed to the regime of Saddam Hussein when he enjoyed the strongest support of the American government. In the 1970s, Hussein’s rise to power was supported by the United States, who regarded him as a valuable client against socialistic and left-wing forces in the Middle East. They also supported him in the 1980s in the war against Iran.

“Any approach to the political problems of the Iraqi people which solicits the support of the United States is an absolutely bankrupt policy. Imperialism has a bloody and reactionary tradition in all of the underdeveloped countries. Democracy is

not going to come to Iraq on the basis of American bombs and a massacre of the Iraqi population. Any Iraqi who allies himself with the war planned by American imperialism is guilty of the most heinous betrayal.

“The Iraqi workers movement has a long history. It had one of the strongest Communist parties in the world, which suffered a political catastrophe as a result of the policies of Stalinism. One needs an extraordinary level of self-deception to believe that American imperialism, which is seeking to steal the natural resources of Iraq to further its own interests, will then proceed to use such reserves for the benefit of the Iraqi people.”

Two young people who support the Attac movement—which calls for taxes and other curbs to be placed on the activities of transnational corporations—asked what could be done immediately to stop the movement towards war. North answered: “We are not political miracle workers. It is mistaken to look for shortcuts and avoid the prolonged and difficult struggle to construct a new leadership amongst broad masses of people. The great problem that one confronts in the world today is the crisis of political perspective. All the old organisations which in one way or another claimed to represent the working class have utterly betrayed it. That is the tragic legacy of the twentieth century.

“Our perspective consists in the construction of an international revolutionary party. We are undertaking this under conditions where millions of people across the world are politically homeless. They do not see any political party that speaks to their interests.

“We are living through a period of the most profound and revolutionary change in the world economy. History teaches us that such changes inevitably express themselves politically. In other words, the potential exists for the emergence of political forms corresponding to the economic developments that have taken place on a world scale.

“There is no substitute for the establishment of an international political movement. To draw the working class into the struggle against war requires that we link the issue of war to the fundamental problems of social existence confronting masses of people in country after country. The only realistic perspective in the struggle against war consists of mobilising the working class, independently of all bourgeois parties, including the Greens.”



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