

# David North speaks at Sydney's Gleebooks

Laura Tiernan  
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World Socialist Web Site International Editorial Board Chairman David North addressed a highly successful event sponsored by leading Sydney bookstore Gleebooks on Wednesday night, to mark the publication of his new book *The Crisis of American Democracy*.

Around 130 people, including academics, university students, publishing industry professionals and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party, listened with interest to a half hour address by North examining the 2000 and 2004 US presidential elections.

North said his latest book presented a theory of American politics and society which viewed the election results as "symptomatic of a profound crisis of American democracy."

The theft of the 2000 election was a fundamental violation of democratic principles. North reminded his audience that in the great plays by William Shakespeare acts of usurpation could not simply be washed away. "Such events always have far-reaching and profound consequences."

Indeed, Bush's installation as president by the US Supreme Court, overriding the democratic will of the American people, was followed by the launching of illegal wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, and the stripping of basic rights such as *habeas corpus* under the Patriot Act.

"The outcome of the 2004 election came as a terrible shock for many people who could not believe that a government so deeply mired in corruption and illegality could be re-elected to office."

North said many Americans had clung to the hope that Bush's undemocratic installation in 2000 was simply an aberration. But 2004 revealed the inability of the democratic system to correct itself or to purge those gangster elements that had violated both the American constitution and international law.

He rejected the argument that Bush's re-election was

the outcome of the democratic will of the people. "[D]emocracy is not just a formal matter of going to the poll and voting. What information do the people have? Even today, despite the existence of a broad opposition to the war, a majority still believes that Saddam Hussein was somehow involved in September 11, and that he had close links to Al Qaeda."

North recalled how the American people had been subjected to a campaign of unrestrained propaganda. He reviewed Bush's 2002 State of the Union address, with its claims of an Iraqi state harbouring nuclear weapons, anthrax and terrorists poised to launch war on the United States. "These words were amplified and broadcast by the media again and again and again..."

"You have to keep in mind the utter corruption of the media, and the extreme difficulty which the average American faces gaining access to objective information. News in America is propaganda, in the most grotesque sense of the word."

The tremendous corruption of American democracy and American political institutions was the outcome of two essential processes. The first was the loss by the United States of its global economic hegemony, the second was the growth of social inequality. "If history tells us anything, it is that high levels of social-inequality are incompatible with democracy."

Staggering levels of wealth were now concentrated in a very small section of the population. Today's top 1,000 CEOs pocketed a combined yearly income of \$25-\$30 billion dollars. "To believe that the power attending such wealth can be concentrated in so few hands, without it having a profound impact on the substance of democracy, is to engage in self-delusion."

In conclusion, North noted the growth in the United States of an openly anti-democratic ideology. A recent book by American intellectual Michael Ignatieff entitled *The Lesser Evil*, propounding an authoritarian definition of democratic rights, was an expression of

this trend. The atrocities at Abu Ghraib, North emphasised, took place in a definite political climate, one fostered by the government, the media, and sections of the academic community.

North said his book aimed to explain the essential processes giving rise to the crisis of American democracy “and to give some sense as well of the powerful social opposition that will emerge to these tendencies.”

Audience members asked a series of questions, centering on the struggle for socialism in the United States. These included the role of the Democratic Party, the political positions of Ralph Nader, the structure of the American electoral system, and the SEP’s attitude to the concept of democracy.

In reply, North spoke about the role of the Democratic Party as the chief political prop for American capitalism. In the elections of 2000 and 2004 the Democrats mounted no opposition whatsoever to the illegal actions of the Bush administration. Historically, the socialist movement had fought to organise the working class independently of the Democratic Party. He outlined the history of the American working class, providing a brief account of the explosive class battles from the Civil War of the 1860s to the militant struggles for the eight-hour day, the formation of the mass industrial unions of the 1930s to the civil rights movement and labor struggles of the 1970s and 80s.

The audience listened with great interest to North’s remarks, remaining after question time to meet with the author and to have their copies of *The Crisis of American Democracy* signed by him.



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