

Following political and legal campaign

PSG hosts successful May 1 lecture at Schöneberg city hall, Berlin

Our reporters
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David North, editor of the *World Socialist Web Site*, delivered a very successful lecture at the Schöneberg city hall in Berlin on May 1. The lecture, which was devoted to answering falsifications of the biography of Leon Trotsky in two recent biographies, was closely followed by an audience of nearly one hundred. At the end of the lecture members of the audience, which included a large number of students, asked a number of questions and expressed their appreciation for the exposition.

The meeting was introduced by Ulrich Rippert, chairman of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party), who welcomed David North and outlined the background to the meeting. Rippert stressed that the fact that the meeting was being held on May Day in one of the main meeting rooms in the historic Schöneberg city hall was significant. It was the result of an intensive political and legal campaign, lasting several weeks, to rebuff attempts by city councillors to stop the lecture from taking place.

At a meeting on April 17, the district office of Tempelhof-Schöneberg decided, against all established practice, to close the city hall on May Day in order to shut down the PSG meeting. The PSG then commenced a political campaign, contacted regional and national media outlets to publicise this abuse of authority by the local council, and at the same time took legal action in order to reverse the district office ruling.

In the course of its campaign the PSG was confronted with a coalition of forces that included all of the established political parties in Berlin. At a meeting of councillors, leading members of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU), Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens all voted to support the ban of the PSG meeting, making clear in their comments that the closure of the city hall was politically motivated.

The judgement last Friday by a Berlin court to uphold the legal action of the PSG and call upon the district authority to make its rooms available was a blow to all of these parties. One day prior to the meeting and nearly six weeks after lodging its initial application to use the hall, the PSG was finally sent the papers necessary to finalise the booking of the meeting.

In his opening remarks Ulrich Rippert explained the political significance of the PSG campaign and the decision by the Berlin court. Rippert noted that the PSG was represented in its court action by the well-known legal firm of Hummer/Kaleck, which had previously defended the PSG against a slanderous attack on the party in 2004 by the Brandenburg intelligence services. The legal firm has also lodged a complaint with the German Constitutional Court aimed at challenging the recent decision of the German government to send Tornado aircraft for military purposes to Afghanistan. Another high profile action undertaken by the firm is the filing of legal accusations against former US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld for war crimes in connection with the war in Iraq.

Rippert said that the PSG had worked closely with its lawyer Sebastian Scharmer in developing its legal case and it was significant that the judgement reached in favour of the PSG complaint by the Second Chamber of the Administration Court in Berlin adopted a number of the arguments drawn up by Scharmer and the PSG.

The Administration Court had ruled that the timing of the district office's decision gave rise "to the suspicion that the closure of the city hall on 1 May was only made to prevent the meeting of the applicant [the PSG]." It added that the state of Berlin was, however, "compelled to treat all parties the same ... The fact that the applicant is not a prohibited political party offers it the guarantee of

the principle of equal opportunity and the right to equal treatment.”

This decision, Rippert stressed, represented a victory for the defence of democratic rights—the right of equal treatment for all political parties and the right to assembly—not just for the PSG, but for the working class as a whole.

Rippert continued by explaining that it was no coincidence the PSG faced such determined bureaucratic opposition to its meeting by the Berlin authorities. In the decades after the Second World War, West Berlin had functioned as the “front line”—a small outpost of West German capitalism surrounded by Stalinist East Germany (GDR). The political ideology of all of the main political parties, in particular the CDU and SPD, was vicious anticommunism—in service of which they sought to exploit all of the crimes of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the GDR, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

During that entire period, the working class confronted enormous obstacles to a genuine socialist perspective. In the East, they were confronted with the brutal suppression of the socialist movement and the corruption of consciousness by the Stalinist bureaucracy. In the west, the same role was played by the bourgeois political parties.

The collapse of Stalinism and the rapid growth of social inequality has led to increased opposition to the capitalist system and a clear revival of interest in a socialist perspective. This is why it is so important today to combat the longstanding lie that equates socialism and Stalinism, Rippert said. The struggle of Trotsky and the Left Opposition is the historical confirmation that there was a socialist alternative to Stalinism. He explained that it was entirely appropriate that the Fourth International was now addressing such issues at its May Day meeting.

In his lecture, North then dealt in depth with the many falsifications and distortions of the life and work of Leon Trotsky contained in recent biographies of the Russian revolutionary by the British historians Ian Thatcher and Geoffrey Swain. North stressed the importance of examining the method used by these two academics and counterposed their use of dubious authorities and absurd accusations lacking any foundation with the painstaking work necessary for real historical research.

The lecture drew on material developed in previous lectures given by North in Scotland and Wales. (See “David North refutes falsifications of Trotsky’s life at lectures in Scotland and Wales”.)

At the end of the lecture in Berlin one member of the

audience asked whether the historical falsifications of Trotsky exemplified in the books of Swain and Thatcher were also to be found in Russia. North answered that there were very similar campaigns taking place in Russia to discredit Trotsky. One example was a recent pseudo-documentary, shown on Russian television, that depicts Trotsky as a Jewish spy in the pay of the Rothschilds seeking to destroy Russia. The program has been shown on two occasions and throughout Russia. Such bizarre lies, North remarked, are part of a general attack on progressive thinking. They are linked with the revival of such reactionary forces as the Russian Tsar and the Orthodox Church.

When asked to comment on reviews in the bourgeois media of the books by Swain and Thatcher, and why the contents of these books had not been discarded by the editorial boards of the well known publishing houses which had produced them, North noted that, apart from the SEP, so far, reviews of the books had been largely favourable. From a scientific point of view, and from the standpoint of serious historiography, it was incomprehensible why such books had been published by respectable publishing houses without someone raising objections. This was a phenomenon that could be explained only politically, North said.

When asked about the role of objectivity in science, North stressed that this had nothing to do with indifference or impartiality towards the subject matter being addressed. It was quite permissible to take sides and put forward one’s own interpretation of history. In so doing, however, one must abide to the logic of objective facts and historical development. One’s own representation must correspond to the logic of events.

North noted that this conception runs contrary to the prevailing notions of post-modernism, which denies the concept of objective truth. This is the complete opposite of the Marxist method, which bases its interpretation of history on painstaking research and a close analysis of objective development and facts. North stated that post-modernism had adopted the standpoint of Nietzsche, who once wrote that the falseness of an opinion is not itself cause for its rejection.



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