

David North addresses meetings in Australia on 15 years of the WSWs

Our correspondents
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Well-attended meetings, convened by the Socialist Equality Party and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, were held in Melbourne and Sydney last weekend to discuss the significance of 15 years of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

David North, chairman of the WSWs international editorial board and national chairman of the SEP in the United States, was the keynote speaker at the meetings—part of a series being held around the world to mark the anniversary.

North began by explaining the manner in which the WSWs had approached the anniversary. It was not a matter of patting ourselves on the back, he said, but seeking to draw from a review of the past 15 years “a deeper insight into the significance of the period through which we are living.” He emphasised the necessity to “understand what is happening from a historical standpoint.” Marxism, he explained, provided a scientific understanding of the underlying objective laws governing the world capitalist system and the development of the international class struggle.

In his comprehensive report, North explained that the programmatic foundations of the WSWs lay in the history of the Trotskyist movement and the strategic experiences of the international working class over the course of the past century. He outlined the essential principles on which the web site had been established, and examined the profound historic significance of what had taken place in the 15 years since 1998.

The speaker pointed to striking parallels between the 15-year period 1998 to 2013 and the corresponding years a century earlier—1898 to 1913, the period that preceded the outbreak of World War I. Both were characterized by intense political, economic, geo-strategic and intellectual crisis, marked by

revolutionary upheavals and rising tensions between the major powers.

After highlighting the US-led wars and neo-colonial interventions of the past 15 years, North drew out the deep-going connection between the eruption of militarism, the launching of a social counter-revolution against the working class and the moves towards dictatorship.

Reviewing a map of the world, North highlighted the flashpoints that could lead, at any time, to a catastrophic world war. In particular, the Asia-Pacific region was becoming the central focus of geo-strategic tensions, because the US was “not prepared to accept or tolerate the emergence of China as a challenge to its economic and global geo-strategic interests.” North summed up the calculations behind President Obama’s “pivot” to Asia. As far as Obama was concerned, the issue was: “How can the US checkmate China, hold back its growth and the expansion of its influence, and prevent access to the materials that it needs for its economic development?”

The speaker stressed that because of Australia’s strategic location within striking distance of China’s major shipping routes, workers and youth were being dragged—completely behind their backs—into the preparations for a US-led war against China.

North reviewed how the US-China conflict was now shaping official Australian political life. Following the US-backed removal of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd—a case of “regime change” in Australia—the Gillard government had signed up to Obama’s “pivot,” agreeing to the stationing of US marines and war planes in northern Australia. After delaying a number of trips to Australia while Rudd was prime minister, Obama had used the Australian parliament, in November 2011, as a platform to announce the “pivot” and declare: “We

see our new posture here in Australia.”

In effect, Obama had told the Australian government: “We want more military bases, more of your money to be spent on the armed forces, and we want more Australian lives, to use the Australian youth as cannon fodder.” North commented: “The Australian people have not been asked about this.”

Demonstrating that detailed plans had already been drawn up to “cripple China’s export trade,” North highlighted the growing importance of Africa as a source of raw materials for China, which made Australia a key strategic base from which to cut off Beijing’s trade routes across the Indian Ocean and through South East Asia. The Australian working class was being “dragooned into insane US plans, dreamt up by the Pentagon and Wall Street,” for a potential nuclear war against China.

During question time, North emphasised that the alternative to US aggression was not to be found in the bankrupt realignment of rapacious bourgeois states, but in the unification of the only force that could stop war—the international working class.

Asked why the Australian government backed the US war preparations, North stated: “The US will brook no opposition!” Prime Minister Julia Gillard had been installed and “positioned herself to carry through the necessary changes” to align completely with the US. The questions should be posed: “What agreements has Gillard made? What treaties has she signed? Shouldn’t the voters know what has been signed behind their backs?”

At the conclusion of the meetings, collections for the SEP’s forthcoming election campaign won a powerful response, raising more than \$12,000. The SEP campaign will oppose the US and Australian war preparations against China as well as the deepening assault on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class.

After the meetings, members of the audience spoke to WSWS correspondents. In Melbourne, **Reece** said: “I didn’t really know what to expect at first but David North gave a really good summary of some very stark similarities between the last 15 years and the same period in the last century, prior to World War I, which I hadn’t noticed before. I knew a bit about the history of that time, but he really drew the parallels between the two periods of economic crisis and the increased

outbreak of war.”

Enrico, a retired building worker who migrated from Italy in the late 1960s, said: “What David North said about US imperialism is so true. The US government has thought it can dominate the world. I am not talking about the American workers, but the rich who do not care about workers at all. When the speaker spoke about Gillard and the removal of Rudd and how the US was behind this—I didn’t know anything about this... I don’t believe that the Gillard government should permit troops in Australia. They have no right to do this.”

At the Sydney meeting, **Ben**, a medical science student at Macquarie University, was also struck by the “striking similarities” established by North with the period before World War I. “We are able to see the progression that has been made over the 15 years, with a continuation of tensions. I found the comparison between now, and the lead up to WWI quite interesting ... it was an impressive comparison.”

Kirby, a worker and former fine arts student, said: “The most important thing that came out of the meeting was definitely the wrap up of how history seems to be rhyming and that it seems like there is going to be an explosion or culminating of events into another world war... You can’t tell if it’s going to happen, like David North said, it is not written down anywhere. We can still change it, but he outlined a lot of points and it seems very possible. It was really enlightening to have a perspective based on history.”



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