

David North speaks in Berlin on the 15th anniversary of the *World Socialist Web Site*

Our correspondents
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On May 11 the chairman of the Socialist Equality Party in the US and chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board, David North, spoke in Berlin on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the WSWS.

North described the web site as “an historical achievement of the Trotskyist movement.” In the past 15 years, the WSWS had provided unparalleled coverage of major political and cultural events.

The web site’s daily analysis, he told his audience, had enabled workers and youth to develop an understanding of the complex processes that underlay the global crisis of capitalism and the development of the international class struggle, thereby formulating an independent revolutionary program for the working class.

North sought to explain the theoretical and political basis of the WSWS. “The founding of the WSWS was the reaction of the International Committee of the Fourth International [ICFI] to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Bourgeois ideologists at the time were proclaiming the ‘End of History.’”

However, capitalism had had sufficient occasion during the past two decades to show what it was capable of, North noted ironically.

“With the end of the Soviet Union,” the speaker continued, “with the specter of socialism supposedly banished from contemporary politics, capitalism was given the opportunity to operate without restraint and work its miracles. Here was its chance to structure society without interference from its long-time socialist nemesis. But the paradise it promised has not emerged—except for the rich.

“In reality, unfettered capitalism has only brought staggering levels of social inequality, mass poverty, unending wars and a political regression toward

dictatorial forms of rule. In terms of the development of culture, the last 20 years have resembled an artistic and intellectual wasteland. Twenty years of uncontrolled capitalism has served to remind the working class why socialism became a mass revolutionary movement in the first place.”

North emphasized the struggle by the ICFI and the WSWS to defend historical materialism. “Bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologists denounce historical materialism as ‘deterministic’ or an attack on the freedom and individuality of the subject, because they reject Marxism as the theoretical prerequisite for the elaboration of a revolutionary socialist program.”

“The central aim of the WSWS is the development of socialist consciousness in the working class,” he stressed. “The practice of the working class in the international class struggle cannot be based on subjective impressions, but rather on an understanding of socio-economic reality and the objective development of the class struggle.”

North noted that the pseudo-left tendencies are intimately bound up with various forms of subjective idealism and irrationalism associated with postmodernism and its offshoots. Citing a passage from the French idealist philosopher Alain Badiou, in which the ex-Maoist professor asserted there was no need for either Marxism or socialism, North emphasized the connection between contemporary anti-materialism, on the one hand, and political hostility to the independent political organization of the working class on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program, on the other.

In the second part of his lecture North analysed the political developments of the 15 years since the founding of the WSWS in 1998.

He called attention to the striking parallels between developments during that period and the 15 years

preceding the First World War, 1898 to 1913. Both periods were marked by immense crisis, revolutionary uprisings and growing conflicts between the great powers.

North explained there was an underlying objective link between the eruption of militarism, social attacks on the working class and the dismantling of democratic rights. These tendencies had become especially pronounced since the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the outbreak of the world economic crisis five years ago and could only be countered by a revolutionary offensive of the working class.

“What would you think if, as was the case in Boston recently, tanks rolled through the streets of Berlin?” the WSWS editorial board chairman queried. “Everyone would immediately ask themselves if the Nazis were back in power!”

Summing up, North characterized the last decade and a half as “a pre-revolutionary era in which the crisis in economic, political, social and intellectual life has continuously intensified.” In this situation, the question of building a revolutionary leadership of the working class to prevent a relapse by humanity into war and barbarism was posed just as sharply as at the beginning of the 20th century. The construction of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International was the critical political task.

At the end of his lecture North called on all those present to participate actively in the building of the ICFI, the Socialist Equality Party (PSE) in Germany and its youth organization, International Students and Youth for Social Equality (IYSSE).

North’s appeal, which flowed from his historical analysis of the political situation, met with a strong reaction from the audience. The subsequent discussion revolved around such issues as the nature of the global crisis, internationalism and the role of the trade unions.

Following the event, a number of attendees told WSWS reporters they were impressed by the Marxist perspective.

Cornelia, a musician from Berlin, explained she found both the lecture and subsequent discussion “very interesting and informative.” She paid tribute to “the analytical approach of Trotskyism,” and expressed her agreement with the internationalist orientation of its politics.

Maximilian, a student, found the presentation “clear

and easy to follow,” regarded the historical comparisons as “entirely appropriate” and concurred with David North’s conclusion that there was no way out of the current crisis within the framework of capitalism.

Barbara, who works in the sales department of a major Berlin company, said that up until now she had been inclined to support the Greens. However, the realization that the latter party was tied to the interests of upper middle class layers, whose criticism of capitalism was merely that they should receive a larger share of the pie, had opened her eyes.



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