

David North speaks on “The Philosophy and Politics of Historical Falsification” at The New School in New York City

Our reporters
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An audience of close to 100 attended a meeting of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at New York City’s New School on March 13. Students, readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* and others heard a wide-ranging lecture by David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the WSWs and national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (US). North spoke on the political and philosophical roots of the falsification of history that has emerged in the more than two decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union and today figures prominently in a renewed drive toward world war.

North began by noting that the current crisis in Ukraine precipitated by the US- and European-backed installation of a right-wing nationalist, anti-Russian regime in Kiev was unfolding in the centenary year of the outbreak of World War I and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the beginning of World War II. Once again, he explained, imperialism was threatening to plunge humanity into world war, this time employing nuclear weapons. North condemned the war-mongering of the Obama administration and its European allies and exposed the hypocrisy of their claims to be upholding international law.

He related the attempts to whitewash the role of fascistic forces in the Ukrainian coup and the newly installed regime to the process of historical falsification that has intensified in the recent period. In particular, he pointed to the claim that the collapse of the Soviet Union represented the death of socialism and “the end of history,” and the growing attempts, centered in German historiography, to relativize the crimes of Hitler’s Third Reich.

North explained the connection between these

reactionary trends in historiography and the role of postmodernism and similar philosophical tendencies, which deny the existence of objective truth and reduce history to a series of competing and equally valid “narratives.” He also related the development of postmodernism and similar theories to the growth of social inequality.

Most recently, the tendency to whitewash the role of Nazism has found expression in the role of Professor Jörg Baberowski of the Humboldt University in Berlin. An ex-Maoist-turned-apologist for the extreme right, he sought last month to provide a platform at the university for Robert Service, whose slanderous biography of Leon Trotsky published several years ago has been widely discredited as a travesty of historical scholarship. North’s own book, *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, has played a central role in exposing Service’s falsifications.

North’s lecture was followed by a lively discussion on many of the issues that had been presented. A student from the Borough of Manhattan Community College asked how the issue of historical falsification was manifested in the writing of college textbooks. Another student from the same school thanked the speaker for his insights and said he would be taking material from the presentation back into his school for discussion with fellow students.

Another student questioned whether it was correct to speak of the role of US and German imperialism in installing the new government in Ukraine, considering the fact that various German officials had spoken out against the NSA spying revealed by Edward Snowden, in particular, the eavesdropping on German Chancellor Angela Merkel. North explained that German and US

imperialism have interests that partly coincide in Ukraine, but that does not eliminate tensions between them or other inter-imperialist rivalries among the major powers. He compared these conflicts to the way capitalist enterprises behave, in competition with one another but also at times cooperating to ensure their control over the market.

Audience members asked questions about postmodernism and several expressed strong agreement with the exposure of its role, especially in the universities. As one explained, “A philosophy that denies objective truth serves to denigrate all learned study in favor of the preferred ‘narrative’ of the individual.”

After the meeting, the IYSSE interviewed a number of students and others in attendance.

Julian, a high school Spanish teacher from central Massachusetts, said North’s lecture was a “devastating” exposure of the various forms of subjectivism taught on campuses today. “The growth of subjectivist ideology as a tool used to suppress people truly concerned with justice in society is integrally linked to the growing threat of warfare across the globe,” he said. “If you go to any campus, it will be dominated by this type of thinking. It needs to be dismantled.”

He spoke about conditions in his hometown, Holyoke, in western Massachusetts, which has been ravaged by decades of de-industrialization and poverty. “I certainly see that the time is now to begin bringing these ideas to youth in my area,” he said.

Katy Lee, a first-year student at Barnard College, said she found the lecture very important. “This is important especially for someone like me who is just starting college and encountering identity politics, which is almost out of control in my classes.

“I’ve been to some of the ISO’s meetings, and this lecture was totally different. It went into what is really behind these preparations for a new imperialist war. It’s incredible to me that they are creating this new ‘narrative’ of German history, covering up the real history.

“The US is currently backing fascist groups in Ukraine. There are YouTube videos of their speeches that are so clearly anti-Semitic.

“Today, students find themselves in an academic place dominated by identity politics. Students put a lot

of faith in their professors, and they might not be bad people, but they too are products of this system that promotes this false ideology.

“How do we tear off the veil of this false education? Sometimes it seems overwhelming, but it is not an option to be overwhelmed when the consequences of not doing so are so high.”

Abraham, another student in attendance, said, “I really enjoyed the lecture. It put a lot of information into perspective. I knew about the situation in Ukraine, but I didn’t realize its history and its impact on global politics. This lecture definitely broadened my perspective.”



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