

David North addresses Sri Lankan SEP launch of Sinhala edition of *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*

David North
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The following greetings were delivered live via the internet by David North to an SEP public meeting in Colombo on March 15. North is chairman of the World Socialist Web Site International Editorial Board, national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (US) and author of The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century.

Dear Comrades and Friends,

It is with great pleasure that I am participating—though at considerable distance—in the book launch of the Sinhalese-language edition of *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*.

I cannot adequately express my appreciation for being so immensely honored by the translation of my book. It is not only that I am aware of the immense amount of intellectual effort, technical work and financial cost that have been necessary to produce this edition. What imparts to this book launch such great significance is the political history of the party that is sponsoring the publication of *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*.

The Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka embodies an immense political experience. It and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League, represent nearly a half-century of struggle in defense of the revolutionary Marxist principles upon which Leon Trotsky based the founding of the Fourth International. In the face of immense political difficulties—repression by the capitalist state, the implacable and criminal hostility of the Stalinists, the opportunist treachery of the LSSP, and the horrors of nearly a quarter-century of

civil war—the Sri Lankan SEP has remained true to its principles, upheld the banner of socialist internationalism, and adhered courageously and intransigently to the path of socialist revolution. It is a source of great satisfaction to know that my book can contribute to the continuation and development of the work of the Sri Lankan SEP.

The basic premise of *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century* is that the great historical problems of the last century remain unresolved. The historical epoch that opened in 1914–17 with the outbreak of World War I and the subsequent conquest of political power by the Bolshevik Party has not ended. We still live in the age of imperialist wars and socialist revolutions. When the English edition of my book was published in mid-2014, not even two years ago, this thesis may have appeared to be controversial and debatable.

Had not the late historian Eric Hobsbawm declared to great acclaim that the “Short Twentieth Century” had been brought to a close by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991? Had he not established, to the great satisfaction of pompous liberals and cynical opportunists all over the world, that the 1917 Bolshevik seizure of power was a grievous error doomed to inevitable failure, and that the age of socialist revolution had ended for all time? Had Hobsbawm not proven that the only lesson to be drawn from the “Short Twentieth Century” was that capitalism was invincible and that it would prevail through an “Endlessly Long Twenty-first Century?”

But who can still accept Hobsbawm’s demoralized

conception? What has proven to be exceptionally “short” is not the time span of the twentieth century but the extent of Hobsbawm’s vision.

We meet today in the midst of a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. The global capitalist system is staggering beneath the accumulated pressure of economic and political crises. The triumphant forward march of capitalism that was so widely predicted in 1991 has failed to materialize. Indeed, the system is racing uncontrollably toward the abyss.

The global economic system is sustained, like a heroin addict, by endless infusions of credit into the banks and equity markets. A continually increasing number of countries and regions are being engulfed by war. These bloody conflicts have killed millions during the past 25 years and transformed millions more into refugees. It is becoming all too clear that the bloody regional conflicts are dress rehearsals for world war. Bourgeois democracy is giving way to a new wave of authoritarianism. The United States, the hypocritical braggart of democratic rule, is toying with fascism. The land of Lincoln is turning into the land of Trump.

There is no peaceful way out of the historical crisis of capitalism. The alternative before mankind is socialism or barbarism. In this situation the lessons of the revolutions and counter-revolutions of the past must be learned. It is my hope that the publication of this new edition of *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century* will contribute significantly to the Marxist-Trotskyist education of the working class and youth in Sri Lanka.



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