

David North speaks in London on Donald Trump's election

Our correspondents
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Approximately 100 workers, students and youth attended a lecture in London on Saturday delivered by David North, the chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party of the US.

North's lecture addressed the causes and consequences of the election victory of Donald Trump.

In explaining the Trump presidency, North contrasted the type of leadership associated with the ascendancy of US capitalism with that associated with the period of its historic decline. In an earlier period, the American bourgeoisie could produce George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. "Now," North said, "they produce Trump."

The conception of the American presidency and how it was viewed was very much shaped by the personalities who had occupied that position, North explained. He noted that Franklin Delano Roosevelt "was seen by masses of workers as the man who created Social Security."

North stated that the consequences of Trump's election "will be enormous." He continued, "I say this to the younger people in this room. Your lives are very much going to be dominated by what happens... you are not going to escape the consequences of such historical development."

Trump represents, he said, "all that is sick, decadent, filthy, backward and stupid in American life, but he didn't come from nowhere."

Noting that Hillary Clinton obtained nearly 3 million more votes than Trump, North explained that prior to 2000, "through all the elections of the 20th century, the man with the most popular votes always won the election." The last time this was not the case before 2000 was in 1888. Yet Trump's loss in the popular vote was not being made an issue by the Democrats,

who were instead attacking Trump from the right—as a catspaw for Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The exclusive focus on the alleged email hacking scandal, with the Democrats claiming without evidence that Russia intervened in the election in favour of Trump, proves that "Trump and the reactionary social and economic policies he presents are not an aberration."

What is being fought out in the ruling elites, North said, are conflicts over foreign policy and the concerns that Trump, with his focus on China, is prepared to do a deal with Putin. "For the faction of the ruling elite that backed Hillary Clinton, [Russia] is considered a greater immediate threat. Or, to put it another way, the long-term prospect of dealing with China and the danger represented by its rise to power requires that the United States first settle accounts with the Russians."

It is important to answer the claims, North said, that Trump had come to power on the basis of a wave of popular reaction. The Democrats organised their election campaign "based on a gathering of lifestyles or identities: ethnic identity, sexual identity, gender identity—and that would be the basis of a coalition. In discussions within the Democratic Party, the issue came up repeatedly, apparently, about the working class. It was Bill Clinton who asked, is there not a danger that we are not making an economic appeal? But that was dismissed as being of no consequence. They definitely did not want to make an appeal to workers on a class basis."

The Democrats were, rather, "oriented to a far more privileged layer, the top 10 percent... This election strategy blew up in the Democrats' faces because they simply wrote off large portions of the working class in the critical states they ultimately lost—Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio."

Had these states been won, Clinton would have also had a majority in the Electoral College. Trump was elected, not as the pseudo-left claim, due to “the manifestation of white privilege,” but because the Democratic vote collapsed.

Barack Obama, North continued, “won a massive popular vote victory in 2008. A broad section of supposedly ‘racist whites’ went and voted for the first African-American president and re-elected him” because “they were attracted to the slogan ‘Change you can believe in.’ They wanted change. That was the era of the economic crash in 2008, itself the product of a long-term economic deterioration, and they voted for Obama... Nothing of the sort happened. He became a president who served to an extraordinary degree the interests of Wall Street.”

North stated that the election actually represented a profound shift to the left in the population. Nearly 13 million had voted for Senator Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries on the basis of his claim to be a “democratic socialist” and his denunciations of the “billionaire class.”

The WSWS chairman referred to Leon Trotsky’s prognosis made in 1928, one year before the Wall Street crash: “In the period of crisis, the hegemony of the United States will operate more completely, more openly and more ruthlessly than in the period of boom. The United States will seek to overcome and extricate herself from her difficulties and maladies primarily at the expense of Europe, regardless of whether this occurs in Asia, Canada, South America, Australia or Europe itself, or whether this takes place peacefully or through war.”

Those words acquire immense immediacy today, he said. Trump, a multi-billionaire, is heading a cabinet of the oligarchy, with those named so far having collectively amassed more than £14 billion in wealth. They will pursue a class war against working people. His appointment of senior military figures implicated in the crimes of US imperialism over the past three decades shows that, internationally, he will attempt to counter the United States’ economic rivals by using American military power.

Answering the question of where America was going, North said it was “to dictatorship, to war and, above all, to revolution.”

He concluded, “In 1914, the ruling elites responded

to the contradictions of capitalism through war. In 1917, the working class responded to those contradictions through revolution in Russia... We are entering into another period of that character, but on a far greater scale. Our epoch is not simply an epoch of social revolution, but of world socialist revolution. Can anyone believe that political upheavals in America will not generate through the world colossal explosions? Already, when one thinks about the situation, are there not clear parallels to the crisis in Britain, the crisis in France, the crisis developing in Austria or Italy?

“As in the United States, we see a growth of immense popular dissatisfaction. The answer to these issues can only be through the building of a political leadership in the working class based on the fundamental conceptions of revolutionary Marxism as they were developed by Lenin and, above all, by Trotsky. We believe that the emergence of the working class is inevitable. It is going to see though the Trumps, the promoters of nationalism here in Britain, the Le Pens in France. The fraud and bankruptcy of these programmes will be very rapidly exposed.”

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International must, he stressed, “turn to the working class, to the advanced sections of youth. We have to provide a socialist alternative.”

North’s lecture was greeted with enthusiastic and sustained applause. In a question-and-answer session, audience members asked North about the composition of the working class today, the US Electoral College system, the Clinton email hacking scandal and the implications of Trump’s anti-Chinese policies.

More than £300 in literature was sold, including many copies of North’s own writings. A collection for the Socialist Equality Party’s £100,000 Development Fund raised almost £4,500.



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