Large turnout for New York City meeting on the contemporary significance of the Russian Revolution

Our reporters
18 November 2017

David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, continued his series of lectures on the contemporary significance of the Russian Revolution Wednesday, November 15, in New York City.

The event, hosted by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at New York University, attracted some 100 people. The high attendance follows successful meetings in California, Michigan and Illinois. The audience included workers from a variety of industries in the New York and New Jersey area as well as a number of professionals.

The audience was dominated, however, by students from colleges and universities and high schools in the New York City area, particularly NYU, Columbia University, the New School and LaGuardia Community College. The high turnout comes after a year-long campaign by the IYSSE for club status at NYU, which marked a milestone when the IYSSE won New Club in Development status at the university.

Marking the centenary year of the Russian Revolution, David North spoke on the international impact and historical origins of the revolution, followed by an examination of its growing relevance in the context of today's social and political crisis.

North recounted how historians and political figures treated the Russian Revolution in earlier periods. In the first third of the 20th Century, for example, he noted how liberals, including American philosopher John Dewey, acknowledged the Russian Revolution as an immense world-historic event representing an existential challenge to capitalism.

The revolution, North said, influenced practically every aspect of society after 1917, from world literature to the anti-imperialist movements in the colonial countries to the fight for industrial unions in the United States. North explained how Soviet economic advances, including a ten-fold increase in GDP from 1917 to 1985, demonstrated the potentials of economic planning, despite the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union.

But despite the undeniable impact of the Russian Revolution, in its centenary year it has been alternately downplayed, ignored and vilified in the bourgeois press. North cited commentaries in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, nominally liberal papers, which argued that Lenin should have been killed.

An animated questions-and-answers period followed the lecture in which questions were raised about the role of the Democratic Party, the conditions facing the working class and the difference between bourgeois and revolutionary journalism. In his answers, North stressed the need to bring a Marxist perspective to the working class and build a revolutionary party to provide a way forward.

After the lecture, attendees donated generously to the *World Socialist Web Site* and purchased literature from Mehring Books, including copies of North's *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*. Groups of students who had come to the meeting together engaged in animated discussions with members of the IYSSE.

Many attendees spoke to the WSWS about the lecture.

Miles Labat, a filmmaker, said: "This was very important. There is no one constructing history with this perspective. This history shows the path to follow and the way to fight against social inequality. It also

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took on the lies about the revolution.

"The lecture really spoke on the cultural decline in the analysis of art and social life. In my own work, I have read Sergei Eisenstein, and his level of thinking is much more progressive than what you see being written on now. There was an impulse of bringing people together and viewing art as part of human development."

Greg, a journalism major at the New School, raised the problem of historical falsification, a topic discussed at length during North's lecture: "Falsification makes historical research difficult. Studying history on a material basis is important, and this angle was really bolstered in the lecture, particularly at the end when [North] made the point that socialism must be present on a global level, not national."

Thelma, a film student at NYU, said she has been curious about the Russian Revolution for years. "But from my readings and discussions with professors, it was hard to get a grasp on it. This lecture really clarified a lot for me. I wish I had come across the WSWS sooner."

When asked what it was that was clarified for her, she replayed: "There's an assumption out there that socialism is just a far-left Democrat idea. I always thought in the back of my mind that there was a difference. I didn't know that in fact it is the Democrats who are suppressing socialism. They even make a career out of it!"

Thelma continued, addressing the international scale of the political and social crisis, "I was in Berlin and a friend was telling me about the rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), and their growth. It's clear that there is a vacuum in politics for the far-right to fill on an international scale, which makes sense because capitalism operates on an international level."

Thelma concluded by saying she was interested in coming to future meetings and reading the WSWS. "What attracts me to socialism is the scientific approach to history and action as opposed to being sentimental."

Fred, an economics student at NYU, was struck by the discussion of the US reactions to the centenary of the Russian Revolution. He commented: "I didn't know there were this many *New York Times* articles on the memory of the Russian Revolution. I've heard a lot about how biased the *New York Times* is. But I am surprised to find out there were articles ignoring and then articles that opposed the memory of the Russian Revolution.

"The *New York Times* articles show less confidence when they say the memory of the Russian Revolution is no big deal or they oppose it. If they were confident, they wouldn't say these things."

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