

David North outlines contemporary relevance of Trotskyism at Colombo media briefing

Our reporters
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David North, International Editorial Board chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site*, addressed an October 1 media conference in Colombo on forthcoming public meetings to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International and the 50th anniversary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka. He will speak at Peradeniya University in Kandy today, October 3, and New Town Hall in Colombo on October 7.

North provided a brief overview of Leon Trotsky's struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, culminating in the founding of the Fourth International, and told journalists that the decades-long fight for socialist internationalism was of vital significance in the contemporary struggle for socialism.

The American Trotskyist thanked the SEP for inviting him to speak in Sri Lanka, adding: "The principled and courageous struggle that the SEP has waged, over a period of a half century, for the unity of all sections of the working class in Sri Lanka, regardless of ethnic or religious background, is well known to, and has inspired, socialists throughout the world."

Opening the press conference, SEP general secretary Wije Dias said the capitalist ruling classes could not explain the underlying reasons for the current economic crisis, let alone present any solutions, and are moving toward dictatorial and autocratic forms of rule.

"Only the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), and its publication, the WSWs, have been able to present a viable explanation for the economic breakdown and the associated political crisis," he said.

Introducing David North, Dias outlined the WSWs International Editorial Board chairman's four-decade role in the world Trotskyist movement and referred

journalists to his books, some of which have been translated into Sinhala and Tamil. These included *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*, *A Quarter Century of War: The US drive for global hegemony 1991 – 2016*, and *The Heritage We Defend: A Contribution to the History of the Fourth International*.

North's address to Monday's media conference, which was attended by reporters from Rupavahini, the national television channel, the state-owned Independent Television Network (ITN), Capitol Radio and *Lanka Web News*, provoked several thoughtful questions. A Capital Radio reporter asked how socialists should respond to "the challenges posed by new technological developments."

North replied: "The development of technology is an immensely progressive factor. Socialists take a critical standpoint toward technology as a factor facilitating the development of socialism. First, it provides the masses direct access to vast amounts of information. Secondly it vastly facilitates the means of communication, contributing to the unification of the struggles of working class and cutting across and undermining national boundaries.

"Finally, developments like artificial intelligence make it possible to reorganise the world economy in the interests of the global population. Once the means of production are taken out of the hands of private ownership—out of production for profit—these developments make it possible to unify workers all over the world, utilise production in the interests of the majority, and introduce scientific planning."

North was asked by the same journalist to comment on what appeared to be "little interest amongst youth in socialism."

North responded by explaining that the betrayals and

historical falsifications of Stalinism and social democracy, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union “created immense confusion amongst the masses. Parties that called themselves ‘socialist’ and ‘communist’ carried out policies that were never Marxist.”

North continued: “But we are now living through a different period, where the working class once again is gaining momentum and needs to fight against the onslaught of social and political reaction.

“The last three decades have seen a universal decline of the living conditions of broad sections of the working class. After decades of anti-communist propaganda in the US, there is now a massive and growing interest in socialism. Young people now have a more favourable view of socialism after having lived under capitalism. I think we are now living in a period where socialism, revolutionary Marxism and internationalism are going to find a broader reception within the working class.”

An ITN journalist asked how the Fourth International responded to other “left organisations.”

North said that many of the political movements emerging in the current crisis and political radicalisation did not have serious answers and could not provide answers to historical questions concerning the fate of the various national bourgeois movements that have failed in every country.

“The Trotskyist movement has analysed and explained their fallacies. Contrary to all of these organisations, the starting point of the ICFI is not the national conditions of any given country, but world politics and world economy,” North said.

ITN’s 6:30 p.m. Sinhala news bulletin included a three-minute report on the press conference and featured the covers of North’s books. The network’s English-language news service, as well as “Vasantham,” its Tamil-language bulletin, also carried brief reports.



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