A serious response at Sydney meeting to mark 80 years of the Fourth International

Our reporters
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A diverse audience of more than 120 people—mainly workers and young people—followed with intense interest a lecture on the relevance of the history of the Fourth International delivered in Sydney on Sunday night by David North, the chairperson of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the United States.

The meeting was part of a series of lectures around the world organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International by Leon Trotsky in 1938. Meetings have already taken place in Sri Lanka and in major cities across the US.

David North will deliver his lecture, entitled "Eighty Years of the Fourth International (1938-2018): The class struggle, revolution and socialism in the 21st century," at meetings in Melbourne this Thursday evening and Wellington, New Zealand, next Sunday.

In Sydney, members of the audience ranged from long-standing members and supporters of the SEP to young students who were attending their first revolutionary socialist meeting. There was a serious response as North explained the striking parallels between the 1930s, when Trotsky established the Fourth International, and the new period of revolutionary upsurge by the international working class today, underscored by the mass "Yellow Vest" protests and industrial strikes in France.

From the beginning of his presentation, North emphasised that an examination of the present situation confronting the working class necessarily involved an examination of the history out of which the present emerged.

Amid the Great Depression of the 1930s and the looming prospect of another world war, Trotsky had established the Fourth International to fight to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership produced by the devastating betrayal of the international working class by Stalinism and the social democratic parties, which had permitted the installation of the fascist regime in Germany in 1933.

Today, North explained, the problems that Trotsky addressed in an earlier stage of the current epoch, which he analysed as the "death agony of capitalism," remained "profoundly relevant to the world in which we live." Once again, humanity faced the danger of war and fascism.

The seriousness of the response to the complex historical, theoretical and political issues raised by North was reflected in a powerful collection of more than $5,000 for the SEP's monthly fund, and the purchase of nearly $400 worth of Marxist literature, including copies of the new edition of North's *The Heritage We Defend*, examining the history of the Fourth International.

WSWS correspondents spoke to some of the workers and students who came to the meeting.

Alyssa, 18, who finished secondary school this year and intends to study law at university, travelled over two hours to attend the meeting. Asked for her response to the lecture, she commented:

"I think it's important that we study history because the same problems that confront the world today and the processes that gave rise to, for example, the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, are the same as those that gave rise to the Wall Street crash in 1929 and led to the Great Depression—it's the crisis of the capitalist system.

"The solution is also in history. Today, you go to school, and in a history lesson you're taught that there is communism in China or in Russia, and that communism is bad. They don't tell you the difference between Stalinism and Trotskyism. They don't tell you that Trotsky represented the opposition and alternative to Stalinism.

"I see the government today as an unstable force, and its interests come into conflict with those of the working class—with the majority of people. There needs to be socialist revolution. The working class needs a socialist perspective and a socialist party, fighting for revolution internationally.

"[The ICFI] does this. A solution won't come from electing the Labor party, the Liberal party, the Greens. They are capitalist parties and will do anything to maintain power over the working class. It's clear if you look at history and at our situation today, that if socialist revolution doesn't happen, capitalism will lead to a third world war."

Col, an 18-year-old, who recently finished high school, was attending his first SEP event.

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He said: “I found out about the meeting from the WSWS, which I read quite a bit. When it was first announced I was really excited, especially to have David North here speaking in person.

“The analyses of geo-political developments on the WSWS and the history of Trotskyism are really interesting. I’ve considered myself a communist since discussions with my friend about the proletariat. I read up on Marxism and that led me to the logical path of Trotskyism.

“It’s incredible the number of crises that are taking place concurrently; that’s why socialism has a growing appeal. There are so many issues that are forcing people to look for an alternative. As David North was saying, this is the last opportunity to form a society that isn’t oppressive. If another war did break out, nuclear weapons would be used and we would face the absolute destruction of humanity. It’s so terrifying, but it’s true.

“I really liked David North’s refutation of pseudo-left ideas. Such a large portion of the ‘left’ is intent on denying the importance of class. If you say something like ‘class is just a constructed identity,’ it leads to a complete misunderstanding of the nature of society.

“It’s profitable to be into identity politics. But it’s so inadequate to addressing the actual problems of society: war, inequality and the actual liberation of humanity. I was really pleased that North spent so long refuting those ideas and reinforcing the importance of traditional Marxist tenets.”

Gus, a construction worker, said he was attending his first political meeting, after seeing a Socialist Equality Party (SEP) poster.

“I don’t normally attend these things, but I’ve been on your website, and been on its podcast for six months, so I am aware of many of the issues that were raised. Only the past few years have I been politically aware. The 2016 US presidential race went for 18 months, and during that time I became interested.

“The charade of Sanders and Trump piqued my interest in politics. Ever since, I’ve been avoiding the propaganda of mainstream media and have been trying to make sense of geopolitics, socialism, the pseudo-left, etc.

“The social democrats, and organisations like the *Jacobin* magazine, capitulate to capitalism. They’re not purists. They compromise. I like the purer strand of socialism that you guys adhere to. It’s an internationalist perspective that speaks truth to power and I feel at home with it.

“There are definitely parallels between today and the 1930s, as shown in the meeting. The far-right are seeing a resurgence in Germany and Brazil. At the same time, there is a lot of anger in the world about inequality. The winds of change are occurring.”

Robyn, science teacher, bought her meeting ticket on a street campaign. This was the first SEP meeting she had attended. She explained:

“I came to the meeting because I have long been aware of the direct attack on democracy, the fact that the government is not protecting workers but instead taking away workers’ rights, and I wondered if a party like yours had the same ideas.

“Education is being run down, particularly in the areas of science and mathematics. Students are not being taught how to think rationally and logically.

“In the workplace, the legal system doesn’t protect employees. The legal system is completely at odds with any idea of compensation. It seems to me that they don’t want injured people in the workforce at all.

“The worst part about it is that unions are following suit. The government can commit a crime against the workers, the legal system is totally on the government’s side and doesn’t support the worker, and the workers’ own union doesn’t support the worker, so effectively the worker has no rights.”

Gum, 19, a student, originally from South Sudan, was particularly interested in “the perspectives of Trotsky and to learn the history of the struggles of the working class.”

Gum commented: “An important thing I learned about was the causes of World Wars I and II—the economic basis of war. It is important to understand what happened in the past, because the same things are happening now.

“I want to read and study Trotsky’s writings. I’m really interested. This perspective can transform the whole world by bringing unity among people to end poverty and war. What we have now is the control of wealth by a few individuals. The majority have nothing, not even enough to eat. We are suffering. I like the principle of the Socialist Equality Party—unify the working class to stop war, stop discrimination.”

Ying, a university student from China, said: “This meeting has persuaded me of the importance of history and understanding it.”

She explained: “What is happening now with all the right-wing movements, it is more important to understand history and how and why these movements emerge. I think for me, the most important thing I got from this meeting is that I have to read more. I’ve not read Trotsky. I’ve seen a movie about Trotsky and that’s all that I knew about him, until I met the SEP. Trotsky’s not approved of in China, we don’t learn about him, so I will definitely have to read more.”

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