

Mehring Books exhibits at London Book Fair

Our reporters
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Mehring Books, the publishing house of the International Committee of the Fourth International, exhibited at the London Book Fair this week. Its stall in London's Olympia Grand hall attracted interest among visitors and exhibitors from around the world.

The London Book Fair is the leading publishing trade fair in the English-speaking world and the second-largest worldwide after the Frankfurter Buchmesse. Almost 1,000 companies exhibited from more than 60 countries, with around 29,000 visitors between March 12 and March 14.

Mehring Books' stand featured the newly released English-language edition of *Why Are They Back? Historical falsification, political conspiracy and the return of fascism in Germany*; the 30th anniversary edition of *The Heritage We Defend: A contribution to the history of the Trotskyist movement*; and *Agents: The FBI and GPU infiltration of the Trotskyist movement*.

On the Fair's opening day, *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board Chairperson David North appeared at a "Meet the Author" event at the Mehring Books stand. Book industry professionals from Japan, India and Israel, along with visitors from China, the UK and Canada, were among those who stopped to speak with North.

Christoph Vandreier, deputy leader of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) in Germany, spoke at a "Meet the Author" event the following day. He explained to those in attendance, "*Why Are They Back?* is a book dealing with how the rise of the far-right in Germany was ideologically and politically prepared."

The far-right Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) is now the official opposition party in the Bundestag (German parliament), Vandreier explained. "Its MPs include neo-Nazi apologists who have publicly opposed the construction of memorials to European victims of the Holocaust, while they declare their support for the record of German soldiers during the Second World

War."

A wave of historical falsification in German universities paved the way for such neo-fascistic statements: "Professor Jörg Baberowski at Humboldt University in Berlin said things like, 'Hitler was not vicious.' There was not a single academic in Germany or internationally opposing this."

A group of students visiting the fair from the United States listened closely as Vandreier discussed how the political struggle of the SGP and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), against historical falsification won widespread backing from students in Germany. "This received a lot of support," Vandreier said.

"There is huge opposition to racism and the rise of the far-right in the population. The support for the far-right does not come from below, but from the top."

The Mehring Books stand attracted a great deal of attention and interest. While book company executives passed by quickly, en route to business meetings (rights negotiations are the main business of the trade fair), more thoughtful visitors paused to take in the poster-sized illustrated covers for *The Heritage We Defend*, *Agents* and *Why Are They Back?* The association of Mehring Books with the heritage of Trotskyism and its concern with fundamental historical questions was apparent.

Among those inquiring on the opening day was the executive vice president of a Japanese publishing house. He was drawn by the book display for *Why Are They Back?* and stopped to discuss what he described as the dangerous rise of Japanese nationalism. "This is a problem not only for Japan. In response, we are seeing the rise of nationalism in China and South Korea. The rubbish of the past is coming back, it seems."

A Russian publishing executive stopped to look more closely at *The Heritage We Defend* and David North's

In Defence of Leon Trotsky. He described Trotsky as “the greatest of all figures in history—not just in his political accomplishments, which were of course very great, but in his entire personality.” He explained that disinformation surrounding Trotsky’s name meant the understanding of Trotsky among Russians was low. He pointed to the recent Russian television series on Trotsky as an example, opposing its promotion of anti-Semitism.

“It seems that I have stumbled on something unexpected at the London Book Fair,” the Russian publishing executive concluded.

A search for “socialist” exhibitors on the London Book Fair app returned Mehring Books as the only result. Verso (founded by *New Left Review* in 1970) and Pluto Press (established in 1969 by the International Socialists) describe themselves as “radical publishers.” In general, their titles reflect the rightward lurch of ex-radical layers among the 1960s middle class, preoccupied with issues of gender, race and sexual orientation, and steeped in postmodernist hostility to philosophical materialism and the working class.

On the final day of the London Book Fair, Mehring Books featured a display in defence of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange and former US Army soldier and courageous whistle-blower Chelsea Manning—jailed again last week for refusing to testify against Assange. The Mehring Books Twitter feed issued the following appeal: “Mehring Books, tweeting all day from the London Book Fair to #FreeAssange. Come visit us at stand 2A43. Show your solidarity with a publisher illegally detained in the middle of London for publishing true information to the world’s people!”

The response was polarised, with many in the corporate publishing world ready to believe the wall of disinformation and lies about Assange and WikiLeaks erected by the mainstream and state-controlled media. A representative from Mehring Books visited the Media Room at the London Book Fair to draw to their attention the Mehring Books initiative. “Julian Assange is perhaps the world’s most famous publisher and his fate should be of real concern to those attending the London Book Fair,” she explained. This appeal was met with naked hostility, with one senior journalist falsely claiming that Assange was “free to leave whenever he chooses” and repeatedly asserting that

Assange was not being illegally and arbitrarily detained.

Despite the disinformation, there were those who responded strongly in Assange and Manning’s defence, and willingly posed to have their photos taken. “Freedom of speech is one of the most important human rights, without which the world is like a prison,” was the statement from one book industry professional, while visitors Anne and Nathalie were proud to speak out: “Chelsea has the strength of her convictions. More people should know about this. It’s supposed to be the land of the free and the brave.” The statements in defence of Assange and Manning were retweeted over 400 times, receiving over 660 likes.

Details on Sunday’s book launch in London of Why Are They Back?:

Sunday, March 17, 2 p.m. Foyles bookshop, Level 6
107 Charing Cross Road, London, WC2H 0DT

Tickets available at eventbrite or at the door £5.00
full price—£2 concession.



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