

Mehring Books launches English-language edition of *Why Are They Back?* in London

Our reporter
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The English-language edition of *Why Are They Back? Historical Falsification, Political Conspiracy and the Return of Fascism in Germany* was launched at London's Foyles bookshop on Sunday. An audience of 150 heard presentations by the book's author Christoph Vandreier, deputy chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (Germany), and David North, chairperson of the *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board.

Opening the meeting, Socialist Equality Party (UK) national secretary Chris Marsden said that Friday's tragic slaughter of 50 Muslim worshippers in Christchurch, New Zealand, "underscores the importance of the discussion we are having today."

Marsden explained that Australian citizen Brenton Tarrant was radicalised in Europe. His manifesto's title, "The Great Replacement," was drawn from French right-wing intellectual Renaud Camus and he spoke of Marine Le Pen's defeat by Emmanuel Macron in the 2017 French presidential election as a "tipping point."

Tarrant was part of an international network of far-right organisations, said Marsden. His manifesto praised Norwegian fascist Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 people in Norway on July 22, 2011, including 69 participants at a Workers' Youth League summer camp. Tarrant also hailed as a hero Darren Osborne, imprisoned in 2017 after driving a van into worshippers outside Finsbury Park mosque in north London. Like Tarrant, Osborne had planned to assassinate London Mayor Sadiq Khan and Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn was physically assaulted only last month at the same mosque's Muslim Welfare Centre.

In Britain, the Brexit referendum had been accompanied by a deluge of nationalism. In June 2016, on the eve of the referendum, fascist Thomas Mair had shot and stabbed Labour MP Jo Cox to death. Tarrant had himself written in support of Brexit, that "it was the British people firing back at mass immigration, cultural displacement and globalism, and that's a great and wonderful thing."

"These are all expressions of the toxic climate whipped up by the ruling class, giving succour to the likes of Osborne, Mair and Tarrant," said Marsden.

In his remarks, Christoph Vandreier stressed that the publication of *Why Are They Back?* was the outcome of a politically unified struggle by the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Europe and the United States. It sought to draw the attention of the international working class to political events of far-reaching significance: "In Germany, for the first time since the end of the Nazi regime a far-right party [Alternative for Germany—AfD] has 90 deputies in the federal parliament.

"*Why Are They Back?* is about how this shift to the right was politically and ideologically prepared."

He explained, "In June 1986, the right-wing historian Ernst Nolte published an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, in which he argued that the Holocaust was an understandable response to the violence of the Soviet Union."

"Many intellectuals at that time understood the political implications of

this historical revanchism" and opposed it with dozens of articles. This struggle was known as the *Historikerstreit* and ended in a decisive defeat of the revisionists. "With the reunification of Germany and the return of German militarism, the right made a number of attempts to reverse the *Historikerstreit*'s outcome."

These attempts came to a head in 2014, at a time when "high ranking German politicians announced the end of military restraint by Germany."

In February of that year, the "biggest German news journal *Der Spiegel* published an article demanding a rewriting of German history." Defending Nolte in this piece was a professor from Berlin's Humboldt University, Jörg Baberowski. Not only did Baberowski say that Nolte was correct, but, "He adds by way of a justification, 'Hitler was no psychopath, and he wasn't vicious. He didn't want people to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table.'"

"Baberowski became a hero of the extreme right and was often quoted and hailed by pages like *Breitbart News* and the *Daily Stormer*."

Vandreier continued, "The policy of the ruling class is no longer compatible with democratic rights. That is why the ruling elite in every country is using more and more authoritarian methods and why fascism is being promoted."

The only movement which opposed this, winning the support of many students and workers, was the Socialist Equality Party and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality:

"The fascists are not a mass movement but are a hated minority. However, the ruling elite is once again promoting fascism and right-wing ideology in order to suppress opposition to its militarism and worsening social inequality... That is why an independent movement of the working class is the only way to fight this danger."

In this context, Vandreier emphasised the re-emergence of the class struggle internationally with workers protesting in growing numbers in Algeria, the United States, Mexico, France and many other countries.

"In Germany there are growing strikes in the auto industry and the public sector, and in our fight at Humboldt University we could see massive support from students throughout Germany and especially from workers."

Recommending *Why Are They Back?* David North noted, "It is extraordinary that what has been taking place in Germany has gone almost completely unreported in the European and American press. The fact that the most politically influential party in Germany today—the official opposition party, the AfD—is a party led by out-and-out pro-Nazis, apologists for Hitler, has been largely ignored, as if it's a non-event."

North recounted how the SEP in Germany first became aware of Baberowski in 2014, after the Humboldt professor sponsored a lecture by prominent British historian Robert Service whose recent biography of Leon Trotsky had been widely discredited. The *American Historical Review* had publicly sided with North's detailed reply to Service, describing Service's Trotsky biography as "hack work" due to its many falsifications and distortions. Confronted with Baberowski's defence of

Service and his suppression of the critique provided by the SEP and IYSSE at Humboldt University, North had predicted, “If they’re lying about Trotsky today, they’ll be lying about Hitler tomorrow.”

The history of fascism in Germany had left a legacy of trauma in every family. The sentiment “Nie wieder” (Never again!) expressed the deep hostility toward fascism in the German population. “The importance of Christoph’s book... is that he makes clear that what has taken place in Germany is a concerted political conspiracy involving the highest levels of the state, with the complicity of an academic community indifferent to the resurgence of neo-Nazi forces.”

North reviewed the history of the 1930s, explaining that Hitler would not have taken power without two essential factors: the complete collapse of working class leadership, both the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Communist Party (KPD); and secondly, the active decision by elements in the German political elite to bring Hitler to power.

“We alone have been paying serious attention to the growth of fascism and the dangers it poses to the working class,” North stated. He recalled a lecture he had given in Wellington, New Zealand, in December 2018, in which he had warned “in this placid and beautiful city” that “fascism was a danger all over the world.”

The horrific attack by Brenton Tarrant against Muslim worshippers had exposed the true ideology of fascism. Turning to Tarrant’s manifesto, North noted his statement that “for once the person that will be called a fascist, is an actual fascist.”

Tarrant had nominated British fascist leader Sir Oswald Mosley “as the person closest to my beliefs.” North responded, “Here in England there’s been a great deal of discussion about anti-Semitism. The issue has been raised in the context of an unending series of diatribes against Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters in the Labour Party. The claim is that they are anti-Semites and that the Labour Party is a hotbed of anti-Semitism. All of you know that we have no truck with Jeremy Corbyn. The manner in which he has replied—or failed to reply—to these slanders goes to the heart of many of our criticisms.

“But what is involved in this attack on Corbyn and his supporters in the Labour Party entails such a vicious falsification of history and such a distortion of reality, that it has served to undermine the ability to conduct a struggle against fascism and anti-Semitism where it really exists.”

North briefly reviewed the career of Oswald Mosley, which illustrated “what anti-Semitism in Britain really represented historically.” He referenced the work of British historians who had demonstrated that “anti-Semitism was central to the outlook of British fascism. Which, by the way, had great support within broad sections of the Tory party.”

“The campaign that has been conducted in the media by the political right and by the right-wing in the Labour Party, and by so many academics who have gone along with this, serves to completely undermine any historical understanding of what fascism really is, what anti-Semitism really is and its implications for the working class.”

During a question and answer session, audience members asked why fascism had been allowed to grow again after the horrors of World War II and whether this was due to popular complacency and why there had been no response within academia in Germany and internationally to efforts to rehabilitate Hitler.

Vandreier explained, “The question of war is back. A major imperialist war by the United States against China and Russia or even among the imperialist powers is possible because of the deep crisis of capitalism.” For German imperialism to assert itself globally as a major military power demands the rewriting of history. “It wasn’t just the case that the newspapers and academics didn’t answer these positions by Baberowski. They defended him and attacked the IYSSE and the SEP.”

North said that efforts to attribute the re-emergence of fascism to individual failings were false. “Humans beings act upon the world not as individuals, but through politics, through political action and political

activity...

“The one central element in the history of the 20th century was that it was an era of unprecedented social struggle, of revolutionary struggle. There were other revolutionary centuries but what distinguished the 20th century was that it was characterized by the conscious effort of great masses of people to end the capitalist system... they acted with a high level of understanding of their class identity.”

The supreme product of that struggle was the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, which was the only time when a political leadership existed that was able to meet up to the historic task posed before the international working class. Faced with the nationalist counter-revolution of Stalinism and the defeats imposed on the working class internationally, a demoralized response developed—epitomised by the Frankfurt School.

“In the absence of a firm and clear understanding of historical processes, of the political issues, easier answers were found in explanations blaming the supposedly inherent failings of human beings.”

Social consciousness can shift very rapidly, North continued. In America, Bernie Sanders is more and more seen as an apologist for the Democratic Party. “People are looking for serious answers and I think you’ll see that the political mood begins to change. The discussions become more intelligent, more thoughtful—and also more optimistic. To the extent that people begin to understand, they also feel that the possibilities of fighting and defeating political reaction are there.”

North concluded, “Great social changes are not immediately comprehended. They are complex. It takes time for people to assimilate the essential political lessons. That process of assimilation finds its most conscious expression within the Marxist movement... The experiences of the 1930s demonstrated the decisive role of political leadership. That is why Trotsky said, in the *Transitional Programme*, when he speaks of the alternatives of fascism or socialism, that the crisis of mankind presents itself as the crisis of revolutionary leadership.”

Following the Q&A, many of those present queued at the Mehring Books stall and to have their copy of *Why Are They Back?* signed by Vandreier. Around £1,500 of literature was sold, including 71 copies of *Why are they Back?* and 18 copies of the newly released *Agents: The FBI and GPU Infiltration of the Trotskyist Movement*.

Why are They Back? is available for pre-order at Mehring Books.



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