

Two hundred attend meeting on the struggle against fascism at Leipzig Book Fair

Our reporters
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A public meeting on “The lessons of the 1930s and the struggle against the far right today,” organised by Mehring Verlag at the Leipzig Book Fair, met with a powerful response on Saturday. Although the meeting took place in a less than favourable location—the Leipzig suburb of Plagwitz—around 200 people attended the event.

“We would have liked to have held this meeting at Leipzig University, as we have done very successfully on several occasions over recent years,” said Ulrich Rippert, the national secretary of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) in opening the meeting. “However, university management refused our request for a room, claiming that no lecture theatres were available.”

This amounted to a clear capitulation to the Alternative for Germany (AfD), and shows how the right-wing extremists enjoy the support of universities, political parties, and important sections of the state apparatus, Rippert said, before adding, “This is precisely what our meeting is directed against.”

Mehring Verlag published two important works for the Book Fair on the struggle against the far right, and on the history of the socialist movement, which were presented at its Non-Fiction Forum. Christoph Vandreier, assistant national secretary of the SGP, introduced his book, *Why are They Back? Historical Falsification, Political Conspiracy, and the Return of Fascism in Germany* and David North, chairman of the international editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, and of the Socialist Equality Party (US), presented the new edition of his highly significant work, *The Heritage we Defend: A Contribution to the History of the Fourth International*.

Both books also formed the centrepiece of Saturday evening’s meeting, and Rippert drew attention, in his opening remarks, to the contemporary relevance and internal connection between them. “Without a detailed understanding of the history of Marxism and the Fourth International, it is impossible to fight for a socialist programme,” he declared. “And without mobilising the working class on the basis of a socialist programme, it is impossible to fight the fascists.”

The main speech was delivered by Christoph Vandreier, who began by pointing to the contemporary relevance of his book.

The brutal terrorist attack in New Zealand was only possible due to the existence of a wide-ranging neo-Nazi network, with close ties to the state apparatus, he explained. “It wasn’t just the action of an individual neo-Nazi,” Vandreier insisted. “It was the expression of a fundamental social tendency.” The speaker mentioned the far-right governments in the United States, Brazil and many European countries. In Germany, right-wing extremist AfD parliamentary deputies glorified the Nazi-era German Army and trivialised the Holocaust. The book *Why are They Back?* demonstrates in detail how this turn to the right has been prepared ideologically and politically.

A key role in this exercise in historical revisionism was played by an article published in *Der Spiegel* in February 2014, calling for a rewriting of German history. In the article, Professor Jörg Baberowski, of Berlin’s Humboldt University, was cited as saying, among other things, that Hitler was not vicious, and that the Holocaust could be equated to shootings carried out during the Russian civil war in 1918. Baberowski was hailed as a hero by neo-Nazis for his trivialisation of Nazi crimes, glorification of violence and agitation against refugees.

But, even more significant than Baberowski’s right-wing extremist positions, was the manner in which academia, the media and the political establishment responded to them. Unlike in the 1980s, during the “Historian’s dispute,” there were no protests from these layers against the relativisation of the Nazis’ crimes. Instead, the IYSSE and SGP were attacked by almost every major daily newspaper, and identified as “left-wing extremists” in the report issued by the grand coalition’s secret service, due to the party’s principled opposition to militarism, nationalism, and the AfD.

“This was how the rise of the far-right was prepared,” said Vandreier. The all-embracing character of the rightward shift and its international scope underscored the fact that a fundamental social tendency was involved, rooted in the deepening capitalist crisis. “The ruling elites’ interests are no longer compatible with democratic rights. This is the reason why, in every country they are increasingly turning to authoritarian forms of rule, and why the fascists are once again winning a hearing,” Vandreier explained.

But, unlike in the 1930s, the fascists today are not a mass movement; they are a hated minority. The masses are moving

to the left around the world, and the class struggle is intensifying. Under these conditions, the central issue is one of political perspective and leadership. “Either the workers take power and create a society based on social equality and democratic participation, or the ruling elites will once again drive humanity into a catastrophe,” Vandreier concluded.

David North underscored the critical importance of Vandreier’s remarks. His book was a summary of the Trotskyist movement’s international analysis, not only relevant for Germany, but for workers and young people around the world. He said he was pleased to announce that the English edition of *Why are They Back?* would be presented by Vandreier in a lecture series in the US in April.

North recalled, at the beginning of his speech, that this autumn would mark the 30th anniversary of German reunification. Only the Trotskyist movement was prepared at the time to understand the wide-ranging political and historical processes at work. “A central argument advanced in *The Heritage We Defend* was that the regime in the Soviet Union, the regimes that existed in Eastern Europe and the GDR itself, were Stalinist, not Socialist. Their policy was not based on Marxism, not on socialist principles, but on the Stalinist and nationalist perversion of those conceptions. And the book made the very explicit prediction that the regimes that had existed in Eastern Europe, unless overthrown in a political revolution by the working class as advocated by Trotsky, would dissolve and restore capitalism,” North said.

More than three decades later, the full implications of this development were clear, North continued. The dissolution of the Soviet Union did not result in the end of history, or even in a new period of democracy and freedom, but its exact opposite: glaring social inequality, a right-wing extremist party in the German parliament, fascist parties in several European governments, Trump in the White House, and military rearmament and preparations for war around the world. The threat of a third world war was now greater than ever before, he warned.

North stressed that the return of this filth was linked to the historic crisis of capitalism. The vast levels of social inequality and the ruling class’s return to military rearmament and war, could only be imposed through the resort to authoritarian forms of rule and fascism, in the face of mounting opposition from workers and young people. Everywhere, he continued, the ruling class feared the spectre of socialism. The fact that US President Donald Trump felt compelled to issue a warning against it underscored how much influence socialism already had.

North then turned to the growth of the international class struggle. “The working class is an international class, which is increasingly aware of its international identity. It thinks of itself less and less in national terms, but in international terms,” he said. North reported that striking Maquiladoras workers in Mexico recently declared their solidarity with a demonstration

organised by the Socialist Equality Party in Detroit, against plant shutdowns and mass lay-offs in the auto industry.

Today, it was inconceivable that the development of social struggles in Germany would not be accompanied by a massive movement of workers throughout Europe. Likewise, the development of the class struggle in Britain, France, Italy, or Eastern Europe would almost overnight be transformed into a European-wide or even worldwide social struggle. Our perspective based itself, in its organisational forms and its political strategy, on the development of the international class struggle, North declared. This was how the rise of the far-right could be stopped.

“They will not conquer again,” North declared. “We can be certain of that. There is no way that the experiences of the 1930s will suddenly be erased from memory. Germany was traumatized by the events that happened in this country between 1933 and 1945. Baberowski and his clique at the university and the lackeys in the administration who support him may think that he can erase the crimes of the Nazis and everyone will forget what happened, but that’s not possible.

“Almost overnight, to the extent people become aware, in this country, of the threat they face, we anticipate an enormous growth of social and political opposition,” North said. “That will not be lacking. But what will be required is a very high level of political and historical awareness.

“German capitalism and the German ruling elites carry the ineradicable virus of fascism; not as individuals, but as representatives of a social system,” he continued. “This has been proven by history.”

North concluded his remarks with an appeal, which found a strong response, “Draw the lessons from this meeting, read the book by Christoph Vandreier and the works of the International Committee, and join the Socialist Equality Party. It is necessary to ensure that this time, the German revolution succeeds as part of the world revolution.”



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