Over 140 attend lecture by Christoph Vandreier in Michigan on “The Threat of Fascism and How to Fight It”

Our reporters
17 April 2019

Over 140 students and workers attended a lecture delivered Monday night at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor by Christoph Vandreier deputy national secretary of the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* (Socialist Equality Party--SGP) on the subject of the threat of fascism and how to fight it. The meeting also featured David North, chairman of the editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and national chairman of the SEP in the US.

Both Vandreier and North will be speaking today at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and tomorrow at New York University. Previous well-attended meetings were held at Wayne State University in Detroit and in Berkeley and San Diego, California.

Vandreier’s lecture is an introduction to the themes of his book, newly translated into English, *Why Are They Back? Historical Falsification, Political Conspiracy and the Return of Fascism in Germany*. The book examines in detail how the rise of the fascistic Alternative for Germany (AfD) has been facilitated by academia, the media and the mainstream capitalist parties.

In his Ann Arbor report, Vandreier explained the role of the SGP and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality in exposing and opposing these developments, notably in relation to extreme right-wing historian Jörg Baberowski, chairman of the Department of East European Studies at Berlin’s Humboldt University.

Vandreier began his remarks by denouncing the detention of WikiLeaks publisher and journalist Julian Assange, who was dragged from the Ecuadorian Embassy in London on the orders of the United States.

“When I started the tour,” Vandreier said, “I was of course aware that the topic of these lectures was very timely, but I couldn’t imagine in what concrete manner it would be timely. On the very day of my last lecture at Wayne State University Julian Assange was arrested and his life is now in acute danger.

“What Julian Assange did is what the corporate-controlled media is no longer doing; he revealed the crimes of the US government and showed the criminal character of this government. But while all the war criminals whose atrocities Julian Assange revealed remained in their positions, the whistleblowers are now brutally attacked.

“One of the most disgusting elements of this is the support for this brutal attack by all the media, by all the bourgeois parties, and not just in the United Sates, but internationally. There is no longer any constituency for the defense of democratic rights within in the ruling elite, quite the opposite.”

“In our fight in Germany against the rise of the far right, and the role of the universities, we precisely showed how the ruling class once again heads toward authoritarian ways of ruling,” Vandreier explained. “The arrest of Assange is an expression of a far deeper development of the ruling elite toward dictatorship.”

North also spoke powerfully in defense of Assange, referring to the case of Carl von Ossietzky, a famous German journalist who was arrested in 1931 for exposing national security secrets. He was released in 1932, but was subsequently rearrested by the Nazis, who tortured him, contributing to his death in 1938.

“Let’s keep in mind how Assange got to where he presently is,' North said. 'He exposed crimes committed by the American government in wars launched on the basis of lies, wars that have cost the lives of at least a million Iraqis and Afghans over the last 18 years. He took information that was bravely provided to him by Chelsea Manning, and made Americans aware by the release of a video, that American soldiers and American airman were

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engaged in the murder of civilians in Iraq."

North added, "The absence of a response to Assange's imprisonment, among academics in particular, is disgraceful." That is part of the problem, he said. "It isn't that there isn't opposition among the broad masses, but the type of information that you need to have, that your faculty should be talking about… you don't hear these things, you are not taught these things. That is a major problem, because the historical questions are of such profound importance."

When North asked if there were any professors or representatives of academic departments in the lecture hall, there was no reply from the audience. "I'm not personally insulted that they don't come; your presence is much more important. But the fact that they don't come and don't respond is a matter of extreme concern."

North went on to address the complicity of academics around the world in the resurgence of fascist forces. He reviewed the support being given to Baberowski by US academics and universities, including a $300,000 research grant from Princeton University in order to justify dictatorship as an "alternative political order."

Many of the students and workers in the audience followed the lectures closely, purchased copies of *Why Are They Back?* and stayed to discuss the issues with WSWS reporters.

"If I had been alive in the 1930s, I would have liked to fight fascism then," Lizzie, a social worker said. "And now we're going down the same path. Trump is taking children from their parents' arms," she added. "I am terrified of Assange's arrest. I wasn't very aware of WikiLeaks until 2016. If it happens to him, it can happen to anyone.

"People who are in power really sell their soul. I will never do it, no matter how poor I have to be."

Zach, a film studies student at UM said he had previously considered the international character of the re-emergence of far-right politics when Bolsanaro was elected in Brazil. "One thing that I was surprised to learn was the complacency of professors. They're not really putting up any fight against fascism. Princeton is even funding the right-wing extremist professor Baberowski with a large research grant to study dictatorship."

"I have had the misfortune of being in Dresden on a Monday afternoon watching Pegida march through the streets," Tad, a reader of the WSWS explained. "I'm aware of the dangers of the AfD and the current events in Germany, and that's why I wanted to attend this meeting. I think a lot of good points were made, and it's really disappointing that no professors were here."

Emmaline, a student at UM who came to the meeting after seeing posters around campus, found the remarks of Vandreier and North to be very informative. "I hadn't thought about the importance of the working class in the struggle against fascism," she said. She agreed that this essential fact has been obscured by the rightward lurch of academia, which has been either ignored or fostered the politics of the far-right.

"It's shocking, but in a way it isn't," Humza, a UM student, said about the rise of the far right. "The fact that academia is shifting to the right has happened in history. In a way it's the same fight that we're fighting again, and it's coming to a head right now. Hopefully, it won't end the same way it did in the 1930s and 40s."

"With Assange, it's a step below a political assassination," he concluded.

"As a member of the working class, what I would love to see is if all the workers went on strike everywhere," Debbie, a bartender at a local restaurant, explained when asked how she thought workers could fight back against the far-right.

Upcoming Meetings:

Cambridge, Massachusetts
Wednesday, April 17, 7:00 p.m.
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Building 6, Room 120 (6-120)
77 Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge, MA 02139
Facebook Event Page

New York, New York
Thursday, April 18, 6:30 p.m.
New York University Global Center Lecture Hall 95
238 Thompson St., New York, New York 10012
Facebook Event Page

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