The Threat of Fascism and How to Fight It

North and Vandreier conclude US tour at New York University

Our reporters
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Over 140 students and workers attended the lecture "The Threat of Fascism and How to Fight It" given at New York University's Manhattan campus by Christoph Vandreier. The meeting was also addressed by David North, chairman of the editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party in the US.

The lecture at New York University (NYU) was the final meeting in Vandreier's speaking tour addressing the themes of his book *Why Are They Back? Historical Falsification, Political Conspiracy and the Return of Fascism in Germany*, which was recently translated into English. The book details the rise of the fascistic Alternative for Germany (AfD), how the AfD has been facilitated by academia, the media and the mainstream capitalist parties in Germany, and the struggle of the SGP and its youth organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), against the rise of the far right.

Prior to speaking at NYU, Vandreier had previously spoken at well-attended meetings at Wayne State University in Detroit, University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Berkeley and San Diego in California, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The New York meeting was attended by students from NYU, Borough of Manhattan Community College, Rutgers University and workers from Verizon, adjunct professors, teachers, and various freelance workers.

In his NYU report, Vandreier began by pointing out that the shift to the right within the political establishment and the attack on basic democratic rights is a global phenomenon, including the Trump administration in the US, Bolsonaro in Brazil, and the latest fascist mass murder in Christchurch, New Zealand.

He further detailed the attempt to rehabilitate the Nazis in Germany, noting, "Deputies in Parliament are now praising the soldiers in World War II. Those are people that carried out some of the most brutal atrocities in human history. Unlike in the 1930s, these far-right figures are not a mass movement, but a hated minority. The shift to the right comes not from below but from above."

After detailing a series of recent attacks on immigrants and preparations for Germany's remilitarization, he added, "An important part of preparing these attacks include rewriting history to whitewash the crimes of the Nazis." Vandreier further elaborated that in comparison to the 1980s, when a large section of professors came out against Ernst Nolte's attempt to relativize the crimes of the Nazi's, the SGP and IYSSE came under attack for criticizing rightwing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski, chairman of the Department of East European Studies at Berlin's Humboldt University.

North continued on the themes of Vandreier's lecture, pointing to the recent arrest of Assange. He played a clip from "Collateral Murder," the infamous video showing a US army helicopter gunship killing 18 people, including two Reuters journalists. He compared the serious journalistic efforts carried out by Assange to the response to his arrest of various bourgeois publications and late-night talk shows, who openly mock Assange's persecution and arrest.

North stressed, "Assange's arrest and persecution has been met with no public outcry. In comparison to the 1960s, which was no golden age, history professors could be counted on to comment on current events and

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place them within their broader historical content.” He further elaborated the rightwing shift within academia, which is reflected in the focus on identity, and cowardly silence by academics on the attack on democratic rights.

He further stressed that he recently contacted a number of professors who attended a recent seminar-conference with Baberowski on Dictatorships in Transition, where the rightwing professor was awarded $300,000 for a research project on “Dictatorships in Transition.” North stated that he had sent a letter to Princeton Professor Deborah Kaple and to “a number of professors including here at NYU and other areas where I would be speaking. I have not received a single reply.”

After the report, audience members posed questions about a program to fight fascism, the role of historical revisionism, and how to share this information with a broader audience.

Mohammad, an economics student at NYU, said about the meeting, “It was very informative. The speakers really reminded people of who Assange was as a figure.

“There is a huge connection between historical issues and what is happening today. What attracts me to socialism is the fact that capitalism tramples over people’s rights and the overall struggle against imperialism.”

Niles, an alumnus from NYU said: "It was a very good meeting; the historical context was important. I agree that the fight against fascism needs to be based on a knowledge of this history. I came because I've always been concerned with the rights of the working class and wanted to learn more about the political situation so that I can share this with others."

Joslyn, a teacher, said, “It was very helpful to understand especially the historical context. It is shocking that Princeton supports the research of Baberowski, which is essentially trying to justify dictatorship. The complacence of the academic community is perhaps not surprising, but still disturbing.”

Chris, an accountant, had heard about the meeting from a friend. He said that what appealed to him about the meeting was, in particular, that the "strains of thought underlying the rise of fascism were identified. The question of historical revisionism really resonated with me. I also really liked the emphasis on the support from the ruling elites [for these forces].”

Johnnie, a freelance IT worker, said, “One thing that drew me to the meeting is that fascism means violence and division in the population. The Democrats have not been able to fight it because they are trapped in the maze of identity politics.

“We now see mass murders are happening in other countries, and it is not just an American phenomenon. We see the same issues spreading throughout the western world and are coming up everywhere.”

Danny, a music composition student at NYU, said he was drawn to the meeting because of “today’s political climate.” After hearing the lectures he stated, “The entire ruling class, no matter how ‘left’ they seem, will always side with fascism.”

Esa, a film and television student at NYU, said about the presentation, “I learned a lot about fascism and where it started. Educating ourselves about where it came from is important to understand how to beat it. You can’t beat it if you don’t really know it.”

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