

Appreciative audience at Australian launch of *Why Are They Back?*

Our reporter
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Why Are They Back? and other publications are currently on sale for half off at Mehring Books.

A full house of about 100 people at Gleebooks, a leading Sydney bookshop, on Monday night responded warmly to the Australian launch of Why Are They Back?, Christoph Vandreier's examination of the factors behind the re-emergence of fascism and militarism in Germany and internationally.

This was a unique political and intellectual event. Vandreier, deputy chairman of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) or Socialist Equality Party, the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, was introduced by David North, the chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* international editorial board and chairman of the SEP in the United States.

North, the author of *The Heritage We Defend*, *In Defence of Leon Trotsky*, and *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*, among numerous other works, has played a pivotal role in the international socialist movement for 45 years. Vandreier has been a key leader in exposing and opposing the resurgence of fascistic elements in Europe, including the efforts of prominent professors to relativise and legitimise the historic crimes of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich.

North and Vandreier conducted an hour-long dialogue on the platform, which included answering questions from the participants. Chairing the event, Linda Tenenbaum, representing Mehring Books, an international publisher of Marxist and socialist literature, explained that both North and Vandreier had travelled long distances to launch this vital work in Australia, following highly successful launches in Germany, London and several cities across the US.

In introducing his conversation with Vandreier, North

began by relating the genesis of the book, which lay in some extraordinary events during February 2014. Jörg Baberowski, a history professor at Berlin's prestigious Humboldt University (HU), had invited Robert Service, the British historian and author of a malicious and discredited biography of Leon Trotsky, to address a public colloquium at the university.

Baberowski then barred North, as well as HU students and historians, from attending the colloquium, where they intended to pose a series of questions to Service. North had previously thoroughly laid bare the falsifications in Service's book, triggering an open letter by prominent historians objecting to the decision of a leading German publishing house to publish the book in German.

On the same day that North was excluded from the colloquium, Baberowski declared his support, in *Der Spiegel*, a prominent German news weekly magazine, for the previously discredited Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte, and asserted a series of lies: that Hitler was not a psychopath, nor vicious and did not like speaking at the dinner table about the mass killing of Jews in the Holocaust.

North explained that Vandreier's book arose out of a discussion that posed the question: what was the political logic and significance of such a drive to legitimise the barbarism of the Nazi regime, and the fact that it had elicited not a word of protest from within Germany's media, political and academic establishments?

In his remarks, North emphasised the wider importance of the book in answering the falsification of history. He referred to the decisive exposures of such falsifications as the 1894 treason accusations against French military officer Alfred Dreyfus, the anti-Semitic "Protocols of Zion" and the Stalinist Moscow Trials

and, more recently, the claims of “weapons of mass destruction” used to justify the criminal invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the slanders that Julian Assange, the imprisoned WikiLeaks founder, was a “rapist.”

Opening the conversation with Vandreier, North asked the book’s author to speak about the political climate that had led to the ruling class silence about Baberowski’s apologetics for fascism. Vandreier responded that the rise of the far-right, not just in Germany, but internationally, represented a “fundamental turn by the entire ruling elite to authoritarianism again.”

Despite the lack of mass support for the neo-fascist Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany) (AfD), the grand coalition government of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats was basically carrying out the AfD’s policies, Vandreier said. It was tripling military spending, setting up refugee concentration camps and enforcing massive job destruction, particularly in the auto industry.

Vandreier explained that the policy of militarism and social inequality was deeply unpopular in Germany. The great majority of working people were saying: “Never again!”

To probe this issue further, North referred to the famous photo-montage on the front cover of *Why Are They Back?*: John Heartfield’s 1930s depiction of German industrialist Friedrich Thyssen manipulating Hitler as a puppet. North asked Vandreier to elaborate on one of the basic themes of the book, that the re-emergence of fascism was not a “groundswell from below” but a “conspiracy from above.”

Vandreier explained that Hitler was installed as Chancellor by the ruling class, via “a conspiracy at the top of the states in 1933,” under conditions where the Nazis had a mass base of support. Today, the situation was very different, with enormous popular hostility to the AfD, reflected in demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people. Yet the ruling parties had made the AfD the official opposition and handed it very important posts in parliament.

In this context, North asked Vandreier to speak about the response among students to the exposure of Baberowski and other right-wing academics by the SGP and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). Vandreier outlined how students had been shocked by Baberowski’s remarks

and many had come to meetings to oppose the response of the university authorities, corporate media outlets and the parliamentary parties, which all denounced the SGP and students for opposing these academics.

With Vandreier, North highlighted “one critical element of the state response”—the decision of the German domestic intelligence agency, Verfassungsschutz, to place the SGP on its list of “subversive” organisations, permitted extra-constitutional methods of surveillance against the party, such as the bugging of phones and homes. Vandreier said a lengthy government submission, defending this listing against a legal challenge by the SGP, was “basically a fascist document,” asserting that socialist ideas themselves were unconstitutional. North explained that the submission did not claim that the SGP conducted any illegal activities, but sought to “criminalise socialist thought.”

Answering a question from an audience member about the significance of the return of fascism to Germany, North said the phenomenon was not confined to that country. “We see all over the world the resurgence of the right-wing,” he said, referring to Trump in the US, Duterte in the Philippines, Bolsonaro in Brazil and governments in Hungary and Poland, among others.

“The question is: why?” North said. Above all, there was an almost complete absence of any opposition to militarism and social inequality by the so-called left, the “pseudo-left,” which enabled the far-right to posture as populists—as opponents of the establishment.

North said the mass struggles now erupting around the world reflected a political shift, but the most decisive factor was the intellectual and political role of the Marxists, the Socialist Equality Parties, in providing this movement with a clear perspective. He concluded by urging audience members to “draw the political conclusions and become active in the SEP.”

Why Are They Back? is available for purchase from Mehring books here.



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