

David North presents *Thirty Years of War at Frankfurt Book Fair*

David North, Johannes Stern

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David North, the chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* international editorial board, presented his latest book, *Thirty Years of War: America's bid for world hegemony 1990–2020*, the expanded German edition of *A Quarter Century of War*, at the Frankfurt Book Fair Friday.

North spoke with Johannes Stern, a WSWS editor and representative of publisher Mehring Verlag, about the significance of the book and the socialist perspective upon which the analysis contained within it is based. A recording of the live discussion is available here in German.

The Frankfurt Book Fair, which was held in digital form this year, is the largest such event in the world. As part of the fair, Mehring Verlag has, in the past, presented a number of crucial works of contemporary Marxism, including previous works by David North. The publisher's catalogue is available here.

"The new book from David North certainly has a particular significance," noted Stern in opening the meeting. "Its relevance and urgency arise out of its title. After three decades of war in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and other countries, the threat of a third world war, which would this time be fought with nuclear weapons, is concrete and immediate."

While the war danger continues to intensify in the eastern Mediterranean and the Caucasus, US President Trump is stepping up his war threats against Iran and China ahead of the presidential election. "Here in Europe, the coronavirus pandemic is also being used to press ahead with the drive to war," added Stern. Germany, in particular, views the crisis as an opportunity to put into practice the great power plans it has long held in reserve.

Stern pointed out that the International Committee of the Fourth International had predicted the drive to war thirty years ago and was the only party to systematically combat the pro-war propaganda at the time. Citing from a report given by David North to an emergency congress of the Workers League on Aug. 30, 1990, which is contained in the book, Stern said:

"As it proclaims the failure of socialism, the imperialist

bourgeoisie, in deeds if not yet in words, proclaims the failure of independence. The deepening crisis confronting all the major imperialist powers compels them to secure control over strategic resources and markets. Former colonies, which had achieved a degree of political independence, must be re-subjugated. In its brutal assault against Iraq, imperialism is giving notice that it intends to restore the type of unrestrained domination of the backward countries that existed prior to World War II."

North explained that the development of this perspective was based on a scientific, i.e., Marxist, insight into the contradictions of world capitalism, and guided by an understanding of the imperialist geopolitics of the major powers.

"As Marxists, we work with an historical conception of world capitalism during an entire epoch," he said. "We understood the events of 1990 in this context." The epoch of wars and revolutions, which began in 1914, did not reach its end with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Already between 1980 and 1990, the United States had acted ever more aggressively, continued North. They spoke about the need to overcome the "Vietnam syndrome." Repeated interventions against national movements were carried out and they became increasingly aggressive towards the Soviet Union, which was itself in a deep crisis.

The Trotskyist movement always rejected the claim of the Stalinists that imperialism had changed, making possible "peaceful coexistence." Imperialism pursued the long-term strategy of conquering the Soviet Union, and the Stalinist bureaucracy served in this as an agency of imperialism. The dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinists, North added, was seen as an opportunity to reverse the result of the 1917 revolution and complete the world hegemony of the United States.

The Trotskyist movement's assessment was confirmed by the destruction of the Soviet Union and the attack on Iraq. "We predicted that the war in Iraq would merely be the prelude to a long period of wars," said North. This development was the essential feature of the past 30 years.

Stern recalled that the propaganda of freedom and prosperity was pushed particularly aggressively in Germany at the time. Although the vast majority of the demonstrators who took to the streets against the Stalinist regime in East Germany (German Democratic Republic--GDR) did not want the restoration of capitalism, the Stalinist bureaucracy, in collaboration with the bourgeoisie in West Germany, managed to impose a bitter defeat on the working class.

North explained that there was a tremendous degree of confusion among the population, both in East and West Germany, especially due to the suppression of Trotskyism in the GDR. “But it quickly became clear that the reintroduction of capitalism would have catastrophic consequences for the people in East Germany and Eastern Europe. All of the old demons of German history returned to the surface,” stated North.

The consequences of these events are visible today everywhere, particularly in the German state apparatus. “In Germany, the fascists are really a force once again,” North said. Neo-Nazi terrorist networks and the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany are being systematically trivialised and built up.

A similar development, North continued, was taking place in the United States. A plot to kidnap and kill the governor of Michigan recently came to light. “The stench of Weimar is wafting through America,” declared North, and added:

“Trump does not have an election strategy, he has a fighting strategy. In case he loses the election, he is preparing for a long-running battle, in the course of which he will increasingly rely on illegal and violent methods. In the face of this pressure, the Democrats will make concessions, just like was done in Weimar. And one has to say, when there are groups ready to murder a governor, then you have a type of civil war. We are witnessing the collapse of American democracy.”

While the danger of a coup in the United States is very real, it is also necessary to sharply warn against any illusions in an electoral victory for the Democrats, North noted. “If Trump wins, that would be a catastrophe. But if Biden wins, that would be a catastrophe in another sense. Because the problems did not begin with Trump and cannot be resolved by the election of Biden.” Trump was merely a symptom of a deep social and political crisis that will continue to deteriorate, regardless of the election outcome.

In the course of the online presentation, a lively discussion took place with viewers on issues such as the bankruptcy of the former anti-war movement and the role of identity politics. As the capitalist crisis deepened, explained North, sections of the petty-bourgeoisie lurched sharply to the right. This was shown particularly clearly by the responses of pseudo-left parties and groups to the global COVID-19

pandemic, North declared.

“We compared the outbreak of the pandemic with the outbreak of the First World War. At that time, they thought in the beginning that the war would soon be over. But that was not the case. The internal contradictions of society became ever clearer. The outbreak of the Russian Revolution was only the beginning of the answer of the working class to this global crisis. Today, it is also becoming ever clearer that this crisis is not simply a medical problem, but is bound up with particular social interests. More than 220,000 people in the United States have died from the pandemic, and there is no programme to prevent further deaths.”

The growing political violence in the United States was aimed at enforcing these reactionary and criminal policies. In the final analysis, North concluded, the rightward shift within the bourgeoisie was a response to a much more fundamental process. He explained:

“It is obvious that the population is moving to the left. That goes for the United States, and especially for Germany, where the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei has been placed under observation by the Verfassungsschutz intelligence service. The ruling class fears a movement to the left, which is currently taking place. This movement in the working class has a colossal international significance.”

The decisive question under these conditions, North and Stern stressed in conclusion, was the building of a revolutionary socialist leadership in the international working class to banish the threat of war and overcome its source, capitalism. North concluded by saying:

“I hope that this book will help workers, students and intellectuals to find access to a Marxist perspective, and will encourage them to join the socialist movement.”

The book *Thirty Years of War: America’s Bid for World Hegemony* will be released on Dec. 1, 2020. It can be pre-ordered here.



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