

The relaunch of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the future of socialism

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25 October 2020

This report was delivered by David North to open the rally, Welcoming the Relaunch of the World Socialist Web Site, held on Sunday, October 25. North is chairman of the International Editorial Board of the WSWs and national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (US).

On behalf of the International Committee of the Fourth International, I would like to welcome the readers and supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* who are participating in this international online rally to celebrate the relaunch of the WSWs.

The relaunch project, which spanned well over a year, involved intense technical, artistic, political and theoretical work. It is now just over three weeks since the new version of the site went online on October 2, 2020. Since that date, there have been approximately 2,300,000 visits to the site and more than 3 million page views. The editorial board is, of course, gratified by the response to the relaunched site. But we recognize that the rapidly expanding readership of the *World Socialist Web Site* does not justify self-satisfaction. The ICFI is compelled to examine this response critically, that is, to identify the objective processes that find expression in the significant growth in the daily circulation of the WSWs.

The response to the WSWs reflects a process of mass political radicalization under conditions of the greatest crisis since the 1930s. The pandemic has exposed the social, economic, political and moral bankruptcy of the world capitalist system. More than 1 million people have been killed by the COVID-19 virus. Within the United States alone, the death toll is approaching a quarter million. By the end of the year, the number of Americans who will have died as a consequence of being infected will certainly be over 300,000. But even as the pandemic rages out of control throughout much of the world, the central preoccupation of capitalist governments is not the containment of the virus but, rather, the protection of profits. This criminal priority underlies the adoption of the homicidal strategy of “herd immunity,” the toleration and even active encouragement of widespread infection regardless of the toll on human life.

The pandemic, as the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained since the beginning of the outbreak, is a “trigger event” which, like the outbreak of World War I, has vastly intensified and brought to the point of explosion all the contradictions of the capitalist system. The two great classes in society—the capitalist class and the working class—are driven into ever more direct and brutal conflict as each of these two forces seek to resolve the contradictions in its own interests. The methods and policies through which the capitalist elites strive to overcome the crisis are the suppression of democracy, fascism and war, all of which are directed toward the maximum exploitation, atomization and impoverishment of the masses of the working people. In response, the working class is compelled to enter onto the road of revolutionary struggle.

This is the political and historical context within which the relaunch of the *World Socialist Web Site* has taken place. But to recognize the objective historical process of which the development of the WSWs is an

expression does not mean that the relaunch of the WSWs, let alone the initial founding of the site nearly 23 years ago, has been the automatic outcome of blind historical forces.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is the product of the conscious effort of the cadre of the International Committee of the Fourth International to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership. The WSWs was first launched in February 1998. Only six years had passed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. For the countless varieties of anti-Marxist revisionism and petty-bourgeois leftism, the breakdown of the bureaucratic regime, as well as the impotence of labor and trade union bureaucracies throughout the world, was met with a paroxysm of despair. “Midnight in the Century” had arrived.

The political and historical situation was appraised in an entirely different manner by the International Committee, which was neither surprised nor in the least discouraged by the fulfillment of Trotsky’s prediction that of the old and reactionary bureaucratic organizations “not one stone” would be left upon another. Notwithstanding the collapse of Stalinism and the putrefaction of the old national reformist and trade union organizations, the capitalist system remained beset by its insoluble contradictions. The task confronting the Fourth International was to prepare for the next stage in the crisis of capitalism and the renewal of the revolutionary movement of the working class.

This historically grounded perspective did not underestimate the enormous difficulties that would have to be overcome. The Trotskyist movement understood and did not minimize the immense damage that had been done to the political consciousness and self-confidence of the international working class by decades of crimes and betrayals committed by Stalinism, social democracy, Maoism, and the pro-corporatist trade unions. Moreover, it was an undeniable fact that these crimes and betrayals had profoundly undermined, and even discredited, the idea of socialism among broad sections of the working class. It would take time, the pressure of objective events, and the emergence of a new generation for the wounds of the past to be healed.

But in this process, the International Committee recognized its own critical role. In 1993, during my first meeting in Kiev with the great Soviet Russian historian Vadim Rogovin—who was then working on the first volume of his history of the struggle of the Left Opposition led by Trotsky against the Stalinist bureaucracy—he asked me how the renewal of a socialist movement could be achieved? I stated that the International Committee was determined to connect the fight for the program of Trotskyism with the rebuilding of a genuine socialist world outlook and culture within the working class. “That is a very lofty ambition,” Vadim replied, and he demonstrated his support for this perspective by completing seven volumes of his great historical work, *Was There an Alternative?* Vadim, who dedicated his final volume to the International Committee, lived to see the launching of the *World Socialist Web Site* before he died of cancer in the autumn of 1998.

Since the launching of the site, there have been more than 8,000 daily

editions of the WSWS. It was initially posted five days a week and moved fairly rapidly to posting six days a week. Not a single scheduled posting date has been missed. Such tenacity is only possible when a publication is guided by a perspective rooted in Marxist theory and the conscious assimilation of the Fourth International's vast historical experience of revolutionary struggle.

In July 1998, less than a half year after the launching of the *World Socialist Web Site*, the political and intellectual foundations and motivations of its work were defined as follows:

1. The insistence of the ICFI on the primacy of internationalism as the basis of the political strategy and tactical organization of the working class.

2. The uncompromising character of the struggle waged by the ICFI against the domination of the working class by the reactionary labor bureaucracies.

3. The emphasis placed upon the revival of a genuine socialist political culture within the working class as an essential intellectual and, one might add, "spiritual" premise of a new international revolutionary movement. ...

4. The struggle against spontaneism and political fatalism in relation to the development of the crisis of capitalism, the class struggle, and the socialist revolution. [1]

The endurance and growth of the *World Socialist Web Site* testify to the correctness of these foundational principles and the Marxist materialist world outlook and Trotskyist political program on which they are based.

But even the most advanced scientific theory and revolutionary program cannot be actualized unless it is fought for. The Marxist program and the high level of political consciousness required for the emergence of a mass socialist movement cannot develop spontaneously within the working class. The development of a revolutionary working class movement, deeply influenced by a socialist world outlook and culture, requires the unrelenting and persistent activity of the Marxist cadre.

After nearly 23 years of continuous and uninterrupted publication of the *World Socialist Web Site*, the work of the cadre of the International Committee of the Fourth International can justly be described as "persistent" and "unrelenting." The publication of the WSWS has required during these more than two decades of publication the daily collaboration of cadre living on different continents.

The staff of the WSWS consists of cadre of a wide range of political experience. Some of the regular writers of the website—comrades such as Barry Grey, Patrick Martin, Nick Beams, Wije Dias, Chris Marsden, Peter Schwarz, Ulrich Rippert, David Walsh, Larry Porter and Fred Mazelis—have been engaged in revolutionary work for many decades, even a half century and longer. Many more writers, and their numbers are rapidly growing, are new recruits to the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International. And there are comrades, now contributing regularly to the WSWS, who are working hard to establish new sections of the International Committee in the countries and regions in which they are located.

A website does not live by writers alone. The WSWS is sustained by an international cadre that attends to the technical maintenance of the site, who proofread articles, and who then post them on the website. And under conditions in which the WSWS must wage a daily battle against the corporate censors, party cadre all over the world intervene in innumerable social media platforms to bring the postings of the site to the attention of a global audience. And this work is strengthened immeasurably by the efforts of countless devoted readers and supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Of course, the publication of the WSWS could not be sustained without the financial resources provided by its loyal readers and supporters.

Terence, a great playwright of the ancient world, wrote: "I am human; and I think nothing human is alien to me." This universal outlook is expressed in the content of the WSWS. The range of its coverage

encompasses a vast range of subjects, events and experiences. The WSWS is oriented first and foremost to the working class. As long as the working class remains under the domination of capitalism, the central focus of the WSWS must be on providing the working class with detailed coverage and analysis of political events and social struggles.

It must teach workers to recognize the difference between a genuine revolutionary program and the counterfeit programs produced by the political agents of the ruling class. The WSWS must continuously raise the historical consciousness of the working class, which is essential for a correct orientation and response to contemporary events. The Trotskyist movement does not tolerate the falsification and denigration of the historical conquests of the past, paid for in blood, whether those of the socialist October Revolution in Russia or of the two great bourgeois-democratic revolutions fought on battlefields of the new American republic.

To the greatest extent possible, the WSWS strives to raise the scientific knowledge and cultural awareness of the working class. There is no aspect of culture that falls outside the purview of the working class. Class consciousness is enriched and made more acute by intellectual engagement and empathy with the widest range of human experience.

The aim of the WSWS is to raise the consciousness of the international working class to the level required for its unification and the global coordination of its struggle to carry out the world socialist revolution and achieve the liberation of humanity—of all ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and racial backgrounds—from all forms of oppression.

Today, we shall hear from speakers who have played a critical role in the work of the *World Socialist Web Site*. The list of speakers is necessarily limited by time. Therefore, they are speaking as representatives of a vast collective effort.

With that I would like to introduce our first speaker.

[1] David North, *Report to the Opening Session of the Eighteenth Plenum of the International Committee of the Fourth International*, July 20, 1998



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact