

The World Socialist Web Site strives to raise the cultural level of the working class

David Walsh
27 October 2020

The WSWS is beginning to publish the speeches delivered by leading members of the ICFI and contributors to the WSWS at the online rally held October 25 to welcome the relaunching of the WSWS that began with the postings of October 2, 2020. The remarks below were given by David Walsh, arts editor of the World Socialist Web Site.

The relaunch of the *World Socialist Web Site* is an enormous achievement that gives us the means of widening the influence of Marxist ideas in the international working class.

The fundamental aim of the WSWS, as our recent statement welcoming the relaunch argues, is to arm the working class with the theoretical understanding, historical knowledge and political insight necessary to wage a highly conscious struggle against capitalism.

We view our work on art, science and culture generally in the same light. We strive at every point to raise the cultural level of the working class in alignment with its immense historical responsibilities—to create a socialist society based on equality and solidarity.

All of this takes on a more intense and urgent character at the present moment, dominated by worldwide political and socioeconomic breakdown and a developing revolutionary crisis.

Over the course of nearly 23 years, we have posted thousands of reviews of artistic works and events in various forms and media on the WSWS. It has been an indispensable element of the website. No other so-called left-wing political tendency has even made a serious effort in this regard. They accept the dominance of academic and postmodernist interpretations, with all their skepticism and pessimism, their rejection of the effort to cognize the world, their hostility to socialism and the working class.

Necessarily, the Marxist critic is always responding to a particular film or book, exhibition or play, as it comes to

the screen or lands on his or her desk. To a certain extent, he or she is taken in one direction or another, aesthetically, socially or historically, by a given work. This one may lead the critic, for example, to mid-19th century France or England, the next raises questions about Soviet art in the 1920s, a third obliges him or her to consider once again the consequences of the Hollywood blacklist.

But whatever the challenge bound up with a particular work, we are always operating with certain underlying conceptions that give shape and coherence to what we do. Those conceptions come out of the long history of the Marxist movement, including the work of figures like Georgi Plekhanov and Alexander Voronsky, in particular Leon Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism and the protracted fight of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) against national opportunism and for a renaissance of classical Marxism.

We begin from the premise that the working class must consciously intervene and change the course of history. This is *not* something that can be done behind its back. Every ounce of our energy must be exerted to assist workers in deepening their knowledge of society, history, human behavior, psychology.

The success of the socialist project depends on a *far higher* level of knowledge and thinking, within *far wider* sections of the population, than currently holds sway.

The artistic cognition of the world is essential in this process. Art, Trotsky insisted, has made human beings more complex and flexible, generalizing their experience and widening their horizons, raising their psyche to a higher level and enriching their minds in a multitude of ways.

This has been the conception of the socialist movement from its earliest days.

How does a revolution come about?

In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union

in 1991, our movement spent a good deal of time considering this. We determined that the October Revolution in Russia in 1917 was the product of a decades-long effort to build up an international socialist culture. Stalinism had delivered immense physical, moral and intellectual blows to that culture. We dedicated ourselves to rebuilding it.

In January 1998, not coincidentally only a few weeks before the launch of the WSWS, at a party school in Australia, in a discussion on art, we addressed what it was that would create an environment “in which it becomes suddenly possible for large numbers of people to rise up and consciously set about the dismantling of the old society, casting aside the prejudices, habits and learned behavior built up over decades, even centuries.”

We suggested that the “sharpening of the critical faculties of the population ... and the raising of its spiritual level to the point where large numbers of people will demonstrate nobility, make great sacrifices, think only of their fellow men and women—all of this arises out of an intellectual and moral heightening which must be the product of the advance of human culture as a whole.” These ideas were cemented into, as it were, the foundations of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

As Rosa Luxemburg wrote in a letter in 1916, “Socialism is not a bread and butter problem, but a cultural movement, a great and proud world-ideology.”

We have made significant strides in the nearly 23 years of the WSWS. No one has a record like ours in regard to criticism of and opposition to the existing political and cultural state of affairs. That extends to our rejection of identity politics, our exposure of the #MeToo sexual witch-hunt and our devastating critique of the 1619 Project.

The present situation is immensely challenging and complex. In the cultural field, as in others, the pandemic has acted like an accelerant, speeding up processes already under way. The figures are staggering. We reported on some the other day. One recent study suggests that in the US the COVID-19 pandemic has wiped out “as many as half of all jobs for performing artists and musicians, and nearly a third of jobs for all those who work in the creative economy.” Another survey indicates that 95 percent of American artists report a loss of income, 62 percent report a “drastic decrease” in work that generates income.

This is a worldwide phenomenon. A report from South Africa, for example, states that this year, “when COVID-19 spread quicker than wildfire, artists and

cultural workers found themselves destitute, stranded, and rejected by the very government that claimed to support them.”

The fundamental attitude of the ruling elite everywhere toward culture, unless it is conventional, harmless and money-making, is a hostile one. It fears every word and thought today that doesn’t confirm the sanctity of property and wealth. The powers that be welcome the destruction of independent-minded and more radical artistic organizations. The de-funding of the arts has gone on for decades, and now the brutal policies of the various governments, which have allowed the coronavirus to ravage the population, are threatening wide portions of the artistic community.

We anticipate a global radicalization among artists, as well as every other thinking segment of society, not simply because of the economic disaster affecting them *specifically*, but because of the general catastrophe represented by the capitalist order—the endless wars, the destitution of tens of millions, the growth of far-right and fascist forces.

The discrediting of the present system is ongoing and irreversible, and this will deeply influence the further development of all the arts. The naked drive for profit, which takes on an openly murderous character in the present situation, will provoke renewed horror and disgust.

The new design of the WSWS allows us to bring forward more of what we have written and what the Fourth International has stood for since its founding, helping in particular to educate a new generation, thirsty for knowledge. We made a pledge to our readers in 1998 that we would cover artistic and cultural developments to the full extent of our abilities and means. We rededicate ourselves to that effort now, with full confidence that the WSWS will provide the intellectual and political resources for the coming global revolutionary struggles.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact