

David North visits Prinkipo to organize Leon Trotsky commemoration event

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On Wednesday, November 2, a delegation led by *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board Chairman David North visited the Prinkipo Municipality in Istanbul and met with Mayor Erdem Gül, elected from the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP), and ?skender Özturanl?, president of the Adalar City Council. Representatives from the Socialist Equality Group in Turkey and WSWs writers Johannes Stern and Evan Blake also attended the meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was to organize an event to commemorate Leon Trotsky on the 83rd anniversary of his assassination by a Stalinist agent. Also discussed were the plans of the municipal administration to turn the Yanaros Mansion, where Trotsky stayed while living on Prinkipo, into a museum and to establish a "Trotsky Research Center" on the island.

David North, the world's leading authority on Leon Trotsky, is the author of *In Defense of Leon Trotsky* and *Leon Trotsky and the Development of Marxism*, which have been translated into Turkish by Mehning Yay?nc?l?k, among other works. At the Tüyap International Istanbul Book Fair in 2019, North presented his book *In Defense of Leon Trotsky* via a video conference.

Trotsky, who co-led the October Revolution of 1917 together with Vladimir Lenin, was deported from the Soviet Union to Turkey in 1929 as an implacable opponent of Stalinism. He was in Istanbul between 1929 and 1933 and spent most of this time on Prinkipo.

The event will be held in August 2023 with international participants and will coincide with several important anniversaries. 2023 is the centenary of the founding of the Turkish Republic, as well as the founding of the Left Opposition to defend the principles on which the October Revolution was based. It will also mark the 90th anniversary of Trotsky's

departure from Turkey for France.

At Wednesday's meeting, North emphasized the historical significance of Trotsky's years on Prinkipo. It was here that Trotsky wrote some of his most important works under conditions of tremendous upheavals all over the world. These included his autobiography, *My Life*; his monumental three-volume work, *The History of the Russian Revolution*; and his critical articles on the dangers posed by the rise of Nazism in Germany (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*).

It was from Prinkipo that Trotsky called for the founding of the Fourth International in 1933. During a visit to the Trotsky House last June, North powerfully explained the importance of Trotsky's work there.

On Wednesday, North underlined the relevance of Trotsky's work in the present, noting that in Ukraine, a few hundred miles northeast of Turkey, a war was raging with devastating consequences for the entire world's population. Describing Trotsky's leading role in the struggle against the rise of fascism and authoritarian regimes and the impending threat of World War II during the 1930s, North noted that today's world faces similar catastrophes stemming from the unresolved questions of the 20th century but on a far more advanced level.

Erdem Gül, the mayor of Prinkipo, said that once when Trotsky was in Prinkipo and Atatürk came to the island, it was discussed whether the two would meet. However, there was never a face-to-face meeting between them.

North pointed to the complexity and sensitivity of the situation and emphasized the difference in attitude towards Trotsky between the governments of Turkey and Mexico and the governments of France and Norway. Turkey and Mexico, both of which had

recently undergone bourgeois revolutions, granted Trotsky asylum after his expulsion from the Soviet Union.

The government of France, where Trotsky went after Turkey in July 1933, informed him that he was no longer welcome after the signing of the USSR-France Mutual Assistance Treaty in 1935, succumbing to the pressure of the Stalinist regime. The social democratic Labor Party government of Norway, where Trotsky moved after France, placed him under house arrest and prevented his political activity. Then in Mexico, where he arrived in January 1937, Trotsky found a similar refuge as in Turkey.

After the meeting, the WSWS delegation visited Yanaros Mansion. Unfortunately, the house, which is a private property, is in a state of disrepair, in particular since the 1999 earthquake in Istanbul which caused much of the building to collapse. The reconstruction of this historical and cultural heritage remains a critical responsibility for the Fourth International, led by the International Committee.

Originally a journalist, Erdem Gül has a record of principled journalism. In November 2015, when he was the Ankara representative of the daily *Cumhuriyet*, he was arrested and jailed for three months along with the newspaper's Editor-in-Chief Can Dündar for reporting on the so-called "M?T trucks." The story pertained to the discovery of weapons believed to be destined for Islamist jihadist forces in Syria in trucks belonging to the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (M?T) that were stopped in the southern Turkish provinces of Hatay and Adana in January 2014.

As President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan personally targeted journalists for their reporting, Erdem Gül made a principled defense of press freedom and the public's right to information during his trial. In his defense in November 2015, Gül said: "My duty is to monitor and report on the government using the state apparatus and to investigate, reveal and share if something is being hidden from the public."

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Group defended the journalists, strongly opposing the state repression of the Erdoğan regime. In May 2016, the court sentenced the journalists to five years in prison each for "disclosing information that should remain confidential for the security or internal or external political interests of the state." The

journalists were later acquitted of this charge.

In a statement on May 8, 2016, the Socialist Equality Group, as it was then called, drew attention to the connection between state repression against the journalists and the war for regime-change in Syria: "... these arrests, made in defiance of the law, are part of an effort by the [Turkish] government, which is preparing to invade Syria, to bring the media under its control, to intimidate other journalists, and to prevent the public from being informed—even if only to a limited extent—about what is about to happen." [1]

The WSWS will continue to provide updates on the event to be held next August.

[1] In *Halil Çelik: Bir Sosyalizm Sava?ı?s?* [İstanbul: Mehring Yayınları, 2022] p. 360



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