

On the 25th anniversary of the World Socialist Web Site

David North
13 February 2023

Twenty-five years ago, on February 14, 1998, the International Committee of the Fourth International began posting the *World Socialist Web Site*. During its first year of publication, the WSWS was posted five days a week. Beginning in March 1999, the WSWS added a sixth day to its weekly postings. Since the day of its founding, not a single day of scheduled postings has been missed. The number of articles that have been posted on the site, in the English language alone, is approximately 100,000. But the WSWS is posted in 29 languages. If one were to include in the tabulation the number of articles in all these languages, it would increase the total number of published articles by several tens of thousands.

The WSWS is, by far, the most widely read Marxist-socialist internet-based publication in the world. Despite persistent and well-documented efforts of Google and other major corporate search engines to block access to the WSWS, the *World Socialist Web Site* records approximately 70,000 page views each day. The total number of WSWS pages viewed in 2022 was 25,995,248. During the first month of this new year, the *World Socialist Web Site* recorded 1,882,673 page views.

The audience for the WSWS is international. Approximately 40 percent of its readers live outside the United States. Its readership is well distributed across all adult age groups. 17.36 percent of WSWS readers are between the ages of 18 and 24. That is, they were born after the WSWS was founded. 26.66 percent are between 25 and 34 years old. For those who are in this age demographic, they have been able to access the WSWS their entire adult lives. 17.91 percent are between the ages of 35 and 44. 14.74 percent are between 45 and 54. 12.97 percent are between 55 and 64. And, finally, 10.36 percent of WSWS readers are over 65 years old.

The sheer volume of the postings on the site, and the size and breadth of its audience, is an extraordinary achievement. But what we are celebrating today is far more than those elements of the WSWS that can be quantified. The *World Socialist Web Site* ranks among the most significant publications in the history of the international socialist movement. The quarter-century of its publication is nothing less than the record of the response of the international Marxist-socialist-Trotskyist movement to the major political, socio-economic, cultural and intellectual events, tendencies and processes of the final years of the twentieth century and the opening decades of the twenty-first century.

In a statement published when the *World Socialist Web Site* was launched, its editorial board defined the principles and purpose of the new publication, which was appearing on a very new communications medium. It explained:

As great events, from financial crises to eruptions of militarism and war, break up the present state of class relations, the WSWS will provide a political orientation for the growing ranks of working people thrown into struggle. We anticipate enormous

battles in every country against unemployment, low wages, austerity policies and violations of democratic rights. The *World Socialist Web Site* insists, however, that the success of these struggles is inseparable from the growth in the influence of a socialist political movement guided by a Marxist world outlook.

Thus the WSWS will strive for an encyclopedic breadth of historical knowledge, cultural criticism, scientific enlightenment and revolutionary strategy. Its goal is to raise the level of political and cultural discourse, which is indispensable for the rebirth of a modern socialist workers movement.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has remained true to the perspective that it advanced 25 years ago.

All the tumultuous events of the last quarter-century have been reported on and subjected to Marxist analysis by the WSWS: the brutal “forever wars” of American imperialism, the economic crashes on Wall Street, the vicissitudes of the global class struggle, the breakdown of democracy, the resurgence of fascistic movements, revolutionary uprisings, counter-revolutionary violence, the natural and ecological disasters that have been fomented by the destructive pursuit of profit and neglect of the social infrastructure, the catastrophic pandemic.

The WSWS has followed the social conditions of the working class and exposed the grotesque level and devastating consequences of social inequality within both the most advanced and the less developed capitalist countries.

The archive of the *World Socialist Web Site* testifies not only to the scope of its coverage, but also to its depth of insight and farsightedness. Its work substantiates the critical role of Marxism as a science of political perspective. The response of the WSWS to the major events of the last quarter-century has stood the test of time.

Even as it has subjected daily events to timely analysis, the *World Socialist Web Site* has not neglected its responsibility to defend Marxism against the many forms of bourgeois ideology promoted in the universities—in particular, the fraudulent caricature of Marxism associated with the Frankfurt School and the irrationalism of post-modernism—and to expose their manifestations in the reactionary self-obsessed identity politics of the middle-class pseudo-left opponents of the working class struggle for socialism.

An essential element of the WSWS’s theoretical work and its commitment to the development of the political and social class consciousness of the workers has been the attention it has given to cultural criticism, a commitment that has found expression in thousands of reviews of films and works in other artistic genres, as well as a continuous flow of social commentary. The *World Socialist Web Site* has waged an uncompromising struggle against the relentless efforts of the ruling class and their accomplices in the media and the entertainment industries to degrade culture, promote and glorify backwardness, and thereby

undermine the sensitivity of the working class to the pervasive violence, oppression, exploitation and injustice of capitalist society.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has also waged war against the falsification of history, to which the ruling class resorts to discredit the great bourgeois democratic and socialist revolutions of the past, and, thereby, to deprive the working class of a means of identifying its present struggles within the historical trajectory of mankind's movement toward the overthrow of capitalism and the liberation of humanity from all forms of oppression and exploitation.

Preparations by the International Committee for the transition of its sections' printed newspapers to the internet began in February 1997. At that time, the World Wide Web was in its infancy. There was hardly a printed mass newspaper in the world that recognized the significance of the new medium. The major capitalist press organs believed that the internet would be little more than a minor supplement to their print publications. The petty-bourgeois radical and pseudo-left organizations either mocked the new medium or took absolutely no notice of it.

But the International Committee, well grounded in the school of historical materialism, recognized the potential and political implications of the internet for the development of the revolutionary movement of the working class. The ICFI identified two critical features of the new communications technology. First, the development of the internet would create and provide the Trotskyist movement with a vast new audience for revolutionary socialist ideas and politics. Second, the new technology would spread across national borders and internationalize communications. It would establish extraordinary opportunities for coordinating and directing the struggles of the international working class on a global scale. The International Committee of the Fourth International recognized that the revolution in communications would provide a physical impulse of unprecedented power for the development of the world socialist revolution.

In its founding statement of February 1998, the WSWS editorial board wrote:

We are confident that the WSWS will become an unprecedented tool for the political education and unification of the working class on an international scale. It will help working people of different countries coordinate their struggles against capital, just as the transnational corporations organize their war against labor across national boundaries. It will facilitate discussion between workers of all nations, allowing them to compare their experiences and elaborate a common strategy. The ICFI expects the world audience for the *World Socialist Web Site* to grow as the internet expands. As a rapid and global form of communication, the internet has extraordinary democratic and revolutionary implications. It can enable a mass audience to gain access to the intellectual resources of the world, from libraries and archives to museums.

As of yet, media conglomerates and governments have not been able to restrict access to the internet, and the cost of publishing material remains relatively low. The proliferation of computers in the homes, schools and workplaces of broad sections of society opens up the possibility of communicating inexpensively with tens of millions of people.

A new generation, now coming into political life, will be educated largely through the medium of the internet. Already, 80-100 million people have access to the Web, and this figure is expected to grow rapidly over the next two years. Given the importance of this technology for modern economic life, we anticipate that it will become increasingly widespread and simple to use.

This prediction of the Editorial Board was soon vindicated. The 80 to 100 million users of the internet in 1998, when the WSWS was launched, rapidly grew into the billions. Today, 25 years after the WSWS was launched, readers may wonder why no other organizations claiming to be on the left reacted in a similar way to this technology. The answer is not that they merely lacked the technological savvy. They did not see the potential of the internet for the development of the global class struggle because that was not what they were interested in or looking for.

But the International Committee was focused like a laser on this revolutionary potential. Again, to quote from the February 1998 statement:

In the fifteenth century Gutenberg's invention of the printing press played a critical role in breaking the control of the Church over intellectual life, undermining feudal institutions, and fostering the great cultural revival that began with the Renaissance and ultimately found expression in the Enlightenment and French Revolution. So today the internet can facilitate a renewal of revolutionary thought. The International Committee of the Fourth International intends to use this technology as a tool for the liberation of the working class and oppressed all over the world.

The *World Socialist Web Site* today makes use of the revolutionary advances in global communications. But the power, endurance and success of the WSWS is derived not from the technology it utilizes, but from the Marxist method, socialist program and historical perspective upon which it is based.

This year marks not only the 25th anniversary of the founding of the WSWS. It is also the centennial year of the founding of the Left Opposition in October 1923, under the leadership of Leon Trotsky. This marked the beginning of the struggle against Stalinism, the counter-revolutionary nationalist program of the Soviet bureaucracy, which carried out the criminal betrayals of socialism that led to countless defeats of the working class throughout the world, and, finally, in 1991, to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism.

The international cadre of Trotskyists who founded the *World Socialist Web Site* in 1998, though relatively small in numbers, were the beneficiaries of the theoretical and political capital accumulated by the Trotskyist movement over the previous 75 years, from the founding of the Left Opposition in 1923, to the Fourth International in 1938, the International Committee in 1953, and all the subsequent struggles against all forms of opportunist revisions of Marxism and Trotskyism. The comrades who initiated the founding of the WSWS and fought for its development had been thoroughly educated in the history of the Trotskyist movement and had already devoted decades of their lives to the building of the Fourth International.

But since the founding of the WSWS a quarter century ago, the efforts of the older generation have been strengthened and carried forward by younger comrades all over the world, many of whom made their first acquaintance with socialism, Marxism and Trotskyism as they searched the internet and discovered the *World Socialist Web Site*. The same path to socialism and process of political education will be followed by millions of young workers and student youth in the near future.

We have every right to be proud of and to celebrate the achievements of the *World Socialist Web Site*. But we are not taking bows and resting on our laurels. The greatest crisis in the history of mankind is now upon us. The outbreak of war in Ukraine is more than a warning. A catastrophe of unprecedented magnitude, far exceeding even the horrors of the two world wars of the twentieth century, is unfolding and threatens the very survival of human civilization.

There can be no greater error than to stake the survival of humanity on the hope that reason will prevail upon imperialist and capitalist governments, that they will reverse course, de-escalate, and put aside their pursuit of profits and geopolitical hegemony.

The indifference of the ruling classes to the impact of their policies on human life has already been exposed by their response to the pandemic, which was summed up in the words of former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, “Let the bodies pile high.” And so they have. Approximately 25 million people have died of COVID-19 since 2020, and the continuing cost of the pandemic in death and disability is being all but ignored. And even today we are witnessing the horrors unfolding in Turkey and Syria, another “natural disaster” that is the result of indifference, negligence and the subordination of all that is important to human beings to the pursuit of personal wealth and power.

There is only one force that can stop the escalation toward catastrophe, whether in the form of war, climate change or another outbreak of an even worse pandemic. Only one force can renew the progressive ascent of humanity. That is the international working class. This alternative and necessary path of development is not a utopian dream. Its actual emergence and historical potential are now visibly foreshadowed in the developing global struggles of the working class. The same objective socio-economic contradictions that drive the ruling classes toward fascism and war impel the global working class to revolution and socialism.

This is the perspective that defines and drives the work of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

We call on all readers and supporters of the WSWWS to join us in carrying forward the work of the site.

Of course, we need your financial support. The growing readership of the site, amidst the expanding global scope of the class struggle, places ever greater demands on the WSWWS. Our editorial staff must be enlarged to respond to its practical and political challenges. The WSWWS must strengthen its technical and programming staff to maintain a complex site that is accessed by millions of readers.

Therefore, we call on you to make the largest possible financial donation to the *World Socialist Web Site*. To make a contribution, go to wsws.org/donate. If at all possible, also pledge to make monthly donations to the WSWWS.

We also ask your assistance in expanding the readership of the site. Forward to coworkers, friends and fellow students articles that appear on the site. Urge them to become regular readers and contributors to the site. We welcome written contributions from readers on important political and social developments and, of course, reports on the class struggle in any part of the world.

And, most important of all, we urge you to make the decision to join the fight for socialism. In this centenary year of Trotskyism, contact and join the Socialist Equality Party or Socialist Equality Group, affiliated with the International Committee of the Fourth International, in your country. To join or obtain more information on how you can initiate work to establish a Socialist Equality group in your region or country, go to wsws.org/join.

2023 will be a critical year. No time must be lost in expanding the circulation and political influence of the *World Socialist Web Site*, the voice of the International Committee of the Fourth International. The millions of readers and supporters must become millions of members and active fighters in the global fight of the working class for socialism.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact