

“The necessity of learning from history”—Workers and students respond to new books on Trotsky and COVID-19 at Australian meeting

Our reporters
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Workers and students attending last Thursday’s book launch in Sydney have voiced their appreciation for Mehring Books’ latest publications: *Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the Twenty-First Century*, written by World Socialist Web Site International Editorial Board chairman David North, and *COVID, Capitalism, and Class War: A Social and Political Chronology of the Pandemic*, edited by Evan Blake.

The successful in-person and online event, which was addressed by David North and Evan Blake and attended by SEP members and supporters from across Australia, provoked an extended question and answer session. Over 50 copies of each book were sold after the meeting.

Estella, a young worker from Broadmeadows, a northern Melbourne suburb, said: “The fact that the *World Socialist Web Site* was able to immediately perceive the pandemic as a world event is because of Trotskyism. As David North explained, Trotskyism is the Marxism of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and I can see how its internationalist and socialist outlook helps predict events and make informed choices regarding history.”

Evan Blake’s address summed up the WSWs reportage on the COVID-19 and its work with principled scientists and medical practitioners, she said, adding: “This has informed me to apply this knowledge to my own activism and spread the word about wearing masks, as well as other things.”

Estella referred to David North’s response to a question about how to combat cynicism and individualism. “David North answered by explaining

that this was created by the conditions that people confronted and that these conditions are now changing. He said, ‘We aren’t worried about a revolution happening but that what is required is the building of a revolutionary leadership needed to lead it.’

“In my experience, the more you increase your understanding of history, the more you’re able to combat cynicism. It makes you stronger and you see the possibilities that are there.

“My generation hasn’t seen big struggles of the working class, they haven’t seen the working class acting as a force. When you read books such as *The History of the Russian Revolution* or *The Heritage We Defend* you learn how the working class has responded before, and how the party responds.”

Sharon, a molecular science student at Macquarie University in Sydney and a member of the International Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), gave a video interview:

Mandy, a Melbourne primary school teacher, said that she had just read the introduction to *COVID, Capitalism and Class War*.

“Seeing this laid out chronologically and how it all unfolded really shocked me,” she said. “I’ve been following the COVID material pretty closely and the WSWs coverage has been second to none. It has really highlighted what is happening and been up front about it.”

Referring to David North’s explanation of the contemporary significance of Leon Trotsky, Mandy said. “I thought that was explained really well and

especially how David North pointed out that if Trotsky was here today, he would have the same perspective about what is happening and where it is coming from.

“It’s very important to make the link between his writings then, and what is happening now. I love the way that the WSWS is always grounded in history and science. This is an important part of the conversation and was covered very well in the meeting.”

Ashlee, a student at La Trobe University in Melbourne and an IYSSE member, spoke about the necessity for young people to study history. “If we don’t learn about the past, how can we overcome all the obstacles and move towards socialism? And in order to understand the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, you have to know about its historical development,” she said.

“As the meeting explained, Leon Trotsky predicted that a war like this could happen and that it can be stopped, but this means we must study history and socialist theory. We need to study the previous world wars but do so through the lens that it is capitalist society that we live in, and that those wars were a product of capitalism.”

Ashlee denounced governments for claiming that the pandemic was over, and their refusal to provide the public with accurate statistics on the deadly virus and the impact of Long COVID.

“If the government still released those statistics, and alerted everyone that COVID is very much still a thing, people would think differently... The company I work for removed the stickers on the floor, designed to keep people six feet apart [for social distancing]. That act alone says to people that this is no longer a thing, it’s not as severe as it was, you don’t need to worry about it. No one’s wearing a mask, or about one out of a hundred. No one’s practising safe hygiene, no one’s aware of the ongoing dangers.”

Rick, a technical writer, instructional designer and copy editor in Melbourne gave video comments:

Marco, a Sydney worker, attended the book launch in person. “What really struck me was the interconnectedness of the two books, which can be distilled into the importance of studying history, learning from history,” he said.

Referring to Blake’s presentation, Marco said the new book “documents a catastrophe the like of which has never been seen in human history. According to the

World Health Organization, the pandemic has cost over 330 million life years globally but already in the bourgeois media this event is fading.

“The takeaway is, we should have done nothing from the beginning. We’re all fine now, we’re all getting on and those who have died, tough luck, because people die anyway. This ties into the whole conversation about eugenics, into passivity.

“If every catastrophe is to be covered up, there is no future under capitalism, life is unviable. It’s anarchy or worse. If we don’t learn from the past, then we’ll have disaster after disaster. Whether it’s a pandemic or nuclear war.

“North’s book does the same. Its main point is that Leon Trotsky was the most significant figure in the history of socialism during the first four decades of the twentieth century. His prediction that the Stalinist bureaucracy would restore capitalism, that we lived in an epoch of the death agony of capitalism are only two of the legacies that Trotsky has left us. Therefore, it’s necessary to study Trotsky for the ongoing struggle, for the victory of socialism.

“The bourgeois media is trying to impose on people the sense that nothing can be done. Through popular entertainment such as cinema, the line that nobody’s up for change is pushed. It isn’t true. Surveys reveal there is hope and it’s a question of raising that consciousness. Objective conditions will compel people to grapple with the issues they face.

“The credibility that the WSWS has established by its coverage of the pandemic, and particularly the veracity of its material, should show people that other WSWS articles are worthwhile studying and factually accurate, whether it’s an analysis of the danger of nuclear war or anything else.”



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