

Leon Trotsky and the struggle for socialism in the 21st century:

David North speaks in London on Gaza, Zionism and the struggle for socialist internationalism

Our reporters

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David North, chairperson of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, spoke at Birkbeck, University of London on Saturday in the latest in an international series of lectures on *Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the Twenty-First Century*.

Introducing North, Socialist Equality Party Assistant National Secretary Tom Scripps told an audience made up of workers and students, “Many of you will have been motivated to attend today by the genocide being carried out against the Palestinians in Gaza by the Israeli army... We are not bringing the questions of Leon Trotsky, the Russian Revolution, the Left Opposition, the Fourth International into the Israel-Palestine question and the anti-war movement; they are already there, lodged at the very centre.

“As with all the crises and catastrophes confronting humanity today, their origin is inexplicable and their solution inconceivable outside of the history of the socialist movement. And above all, the struggle of the Trotskyist movement to defend its revolutionary internationalist principles and the Leninist conception of an independent, vanguard party of the working class.”

North’s presentation dealt with the historical and programmatic issues raised by Israel’s bloody campaign of mass murder and ethnic cleansing. He began by examining the significance of the Open Letter by James P. Cannon to the world Trotskyist movement, issued on November 16, 1953, in defending the perspective of world socialist revolution and defeating the liquidationist assault led by Michel Pablo and

Ernest Mandel against the Fourth International.

“Seventy years after its publication, the Open Letter retains undiminished relevance as a summation of the present political situation and the tasks of the Fourth International, led by the International Committee,” North said.

Addressing Israel’s carpet bombing and invasion of Gaza, carried out with the full support of the United States, Britain and all the major imperialist powers, North set out to refute the slander utilised as the main weapon against the mass global protests in defence of the Palestinians, that they are “anti-Semitic.” He did so by detailing at length the historical origins of Zionism as a “philosophically irrationalist and national chauvinist” rejection of the socialist and internationalist perspective of Marxism, insisting on the primacy of race over class, the national state as the essential foundation of political life, and the building of a Jewish state as an opposed goal to the struggle for world socialism.

Presenting complex and unfamiliar material, North urged his audience to consider how the struggle to end the genocide of the Palestinians “vindicates and imparts the greatest urgency to the central perspective and *raison d’être* of the International Committee of the Fourth International: the struggle for the world socialist revolution.”

North’s report was followed with great care and met with warm applause. It provoked intense discussion lasting over an hour with questions on Zionism, anti-Semitism, and the history of the Trotskyist movement. A financial appeal raised over £3,800.

A measure of the political interest generated was the sale of almost £1,000 in literature, including a large number of North's latest publication, *Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the Twenty-First Century*, which provided the title of the lecture series.

Outside the meeting, discussion continued in small groups and one-to-one conversations for another hour, with several attendees expressing an interest in joining the Socialist Equality Party.

Bill is a student at London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

David from London said the meeting "was very thought provoking and extremely topical. The fact that the speaker could relate things which are happening in real time to the socialist theory made it very interesting."

He had learned about "the history of Zionism and its differences with socialism. That history is obviously extremely relevant today. It sounds obvious, but from a socialist perspective it only makes sense on an international scale. To have nationalist boundaries would not make sense to a socialist."

The meeting had raised an important point that in backing Israel, the imperialist powers are supporting their own war policies. "That's the reality of what's taking place today. I think it's important that people stand up to this despite the intimidation and stand in solidarity with the people who are suffering from this genocide."

David said it was important that the lecture raised the issue of anti-Semitism. "If you have any criticism at all of Israeli government policy, or actions taken in the name of the Israeli government, which we have to remember half of the population of Israel has been protesting against the Netanyahu government for the last year or so, I can't see how this extremist government can be beyond criticism from people around the world."

"It's self-defeating to label that criticism anti-Semitic and it will only embolden the true anti-Semites which to my mind are from the right wing not the left. It's a reactionary approach and I think we have to continue to stand up and say what we feel and not be afraid of what comes the other way."

"Trotsky had so much foresight. He would have seen years before that this would cause conflict and he is as relevant as ever 100 years later."

Kenny, a longstanding reader of the WSWS originally from Scotland, said, "I thought the meeting was excellent, especially the historical perspective on Zionism which is particularly necessary in the present circumstances in the war against Gaza. Because that's going to come more to the forefront in the near future, because governments class all opposition to Zionism as anti-Semitism."

"There has to be an international movement of the working class in different nations to overthrow decaying capitalism."

Giain, a student from North Wales, said, "I can't see a future for young people under capitalism, we need a revolution. The working class has to come together, and I agree it has to be done internationally."

"I'm against fascism, which is the real anti-Semitism. The people demonstrating for a ceasefire are demonstrating against Israel not Jews."



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