

“All the problems of our times are world problems.”

David North answers questions at Wayne State University on the Gaza genocide and the fight for socialism

Zac Corrigan, Nancy Hanover

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On April 8, David North answered questions about the Gaza genocide at a public event held at Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit, Michigan, hosted by the WSU chapter of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).

The extensive, historically-grounded answers given by North, a leader in the Trotskyist movement for over 50 years, should be studied by all those who want to stop the genocide in Gaza and the descent into World War III.

Videos of four important exchanges from the meeting can be found below.

The meeting was opened by Adham, the president of the WSU chapter of the IYSSE, who explained that the IYSSE was the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party, the American section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement. He noted that the IYSSE has sister organizations in countries internationally, including in the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, Ukraine, Australia and Sri Lanka.

“We insist that the social crisis confronting humanity, including war, genocide, poverty, social inequality, the threat of climate change and pandemics are caused by the economic system under which we live, capitalism,” Adham concluded. He encouraged attendees to get involved with the IYSSE on campus and join the club in going to Detroit auto factories to fight for a socialist solution to austerity and war.

Evan Blake, a member of the Socialist Equality Party’s National Committee, moderated the discussion. He began by cautioning the meeting on the persistent spread of COVID-19 and thanked everyone in attendance for masking. He said all panelists tested beforehand, and the SEP had set up far-UV lamps and HEPA filters for the additional protection of the audience.

Making clear the long history of struggle by the Trotskyist movement against war and genocide, Blake cited North’s role as a leader in the ICFI for a half-century. Blake briefly reviewed eight of North’s books analyzing the burning issues confronting workers and youth today. He gave special attention to North’s most recent volume, *Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the Twenty-First Century*, which focuses on the life, political work and significance of the co-leader of the Russian Revolution, whose analysis is indispensable for young people and workers seeking to end capitalism.

Turning to North’s *The Logic of Zionism: from Nationalist Myth to the Gaza Genocide*, published this year, Blake said the volume compiled a series of lectures that “represent the most significant examination of the historical roots and reactionary ideological underpinnings of Zionism, which have culminated in the present-day imperialist-backed slaughter

being carried out by the fascist Netanyahu regime in Israel.”

Blake continued:

The lectures trace the development of Zionism as a nationalist movement that has always been in sharp conflict with socialist internationalism and the most advanced sections of the Jewish working class and intelligentsia.

Questions and Answers

The first question directed to North came from Adham, who asked if there had been “any major shifts in what you believe the role of a socialist should be during your time in the socialist movement?”

North’s in-depth response noted specific events of the 1960s, when his generation became radicalized, but emphasized the connection of that period to antecedent world history. He recalled that he first began studying Trotsky in 1970, as the world was still reeling from the French general strike of May 1968.

North recounted:

What had begun as a student strike in Paris at the Sorbonne University developed and escalated into a general strike of the French working class. It not only staggered France, it staggered the entire world. Suddenly, almost overnight, socialist revolution by the working class was on the order of the day.

Describing the political climate across the world at that time, North stated that 1968 was also the year of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, which enormously escalated the anti-war movement and showed the US propaganda of “imminent victory” to be lies. US President Lyndon Johnson announced he would not run for reelection on March 31, and on April 4, Martin Luther King was assassinated.

North emphasized that the May-June general strike “suddenly made clear that the basic conceptions of Marxism, of the revolutionary role of the working class as a decisive force, was not just a matter of history, it was real.”

Alongside these developments, he said, there was renewed interest in Leon Trotsky. North cited the trilogy by Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1879–1921*, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky 1921–1929*, and *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky 1929–1940*.

"It was an extraordinarily important book because it presented to a whole new generation this figure who had been covered in so many lies and distortions, the most slandered figure in modern history, Leon Trotsky," North said, adding that the trilogy "introduced youth to a genuine Marxist critique of Stalinism."

Posing the question, "Why was my generation so radical in the 1960s?" North said:

If you want to understand what framed the thinking of my generation and determined the extreme radicalism of our response to Vietnam, you have to go further back. It was World War Two. It was World War One.

North also pointed to the big historical questions that needed to be answered then, as now. "You ask what has changed since that time? Of course, the great problem which we had then was trying to find out ... who are the socialists?"

North explained:

There were many organizations which called themselves socialist—so many parties which claimed to be socialist. There was, of course, the Communist Party. There were the many varieties of organizations which even claimed to be Trotskyist.

Now, look at the present situation today. What has happened to all these great mass movements? When I joined the socialist movement, the Communists called themselves "real existing socialism." The Trotskyist movement said these are counterrevolutionary parties. They do not represent the continuity of the Marxist tradition. They are the worst enemies of the working class, and "not one stone will be left of them upon another." We emphasized that Stalin was the gravedigger of the working class, and that unless the working class carried through a political revolution against the Soviet bureaucracy, the USSR would end with the restoration of capitalism.

How did one determine what the real socialism was? The critique of Trotsky was so fundamental because what Trotsky presented was a world revolutionary conception.

Concluding, North said:

Here we come to, I think, the most fundamental question of what has changed. It is the extent to which the world has been globalized in every sense. Every event is a world event. Production is a global process and change must occur on a global scale. What accounts for the power of Trotskyism is that it expresses this. Our program corresponds to the objective development of world economy.

There is no national solution to the problems of our times. All the problems are world problems. That's the greatest change.

David, a WSU IYSSE member and Amazon worker, said he watched North's lecture on Aaron Bushnell and asked, "Bushnell tragically took his life to protest the genocide in Gaza. What progressive role can youth play in ending the genocide in Gaza?"

North described young people as a "political barometer of society." He continued:

They haven't become desensitized to hypocrisy, to the contradiction between the ideals that are proclaimed and the reality that they see. And so they're given to protest.

But young people by themselves cannot change the world. They can be a catalytic force in stimulating change. But unless the young people establish contact and direct their protest to a force which is capable of effecting change, then, as is so often the case, the protest is misled.

North described how he would have addressed Bushnell, urging him to build a political movement in the working class. North strenuously opposed the attitude of those like journalist Chris Hedges who glorified suicide and despair.

Addressing the young people in the audience, North said:

I would hope, perhaps we can't answer every question you have, but if we can encourage you now to start studying and learning from the great and often tragic revolutionary experiences of the last century, if you can assimilate that, you'll be preparing yourself and the working class for what's to come.

The final panelists' question came from Amanda, who said:

I had the privilege of attending one of your lectures at the University of Michigan recently about the Zionist myth. And something that really struck me was your conception that the creation of the State of Israel is a mockery and a betrayal of the Jewish people. And I was wondering if you could speak more on that conception and other Trotskyist attitudes towards the creation of the State of Israel.

North noted that the Jewish people have been profoundly oppressed for many centuries. But he stressed:

All phenomena, even the phenomena of hatred, have to be examined. Historically and in the latter part of the 19th century, hatred of Jews acquired a new dimension, a new character. It was profoundly related to changes in the socioeconomic structure of society, the emergence of modern industrial capitalism, the emergence of the working class as a revolutionary force, and the emergence of socialism. More and more the traditional hatred of Jews became bound up with a political movement directed against socialism.

In other words, North explained, "The ruling elites sought to exploit what had been traditionally a religious antagonism to direct it politically against the socialist movement." North then explained the origins of Zionism and the evolution of this ideology, including the "Holocaust industry," and the reactionary deployment of identity politics.

North told the audience, "If anything demonstrates the bankruptcy of nationalism, it is the Zionist project."

History shows, he continued:

Zionism was constructed as a national imperialist project. But it

was false from the beginning. And now the horrific consequences of nationalism, of the defense of the nation-state system, the artificial construction of nationality as a principle to justify oppression, is being exploded.

Zionism as a movement basically adopted an ideology that was already becoming discredited, or being overtaken by the actual process of socioeconomic development. The heyday of nationalism was from its emergence as a potent force through the 17th, through the 18th, and certainly into the 19th century. The period of the consolidation of the great national states comes more and more under pressure during the second half of the 19th century.

By 1847-48, Marx already defines this. The working class has no country. The working class is an international force, and, he says, the next stage of historical development will not be the consolidation of national states, but the international unification of mankind in a socialist movement. And that was to be vindicated and verified in the growth of world socialism.

During open discussion, several audience members raised questions about the Socialist Equality Party's presidential election candidates, Joseph Kishore and Jerry White, asking if voting for the SEP opened the door for Donald Trump or was "throwing away" their vote.

North, in response, denounced the politics of "lesser evilism."

When you tell workers to vote for Biden, you are accepting responsibility for the consequences. So if the day after the election, or even in the midst of it, Biden escalates the war against Ukraine or sends more bombs, or allies himself with Israel in a war against Iran, what is the oversight? Well, you're responsible for it. What have you done to prepare the working class for that eventuality?

He concluded:

When an election comes, we don't drop our principles. Our politics during an election is consistent with our politics before the election. We are a party of principles, of historical conceptions, not of pragmatic short-term results... So for us, the election is an opportunity. We use it to carry out the absolutely essential work of political education. That's our method. As Trotsky said, to educate workers on what they must save and what they must overthrow.



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