

Socialism and the fight against war and genocide

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On Wednesday, the Socialist Equality Party hosted a live-streamed discussion to mark the one-year anniversary of the Gaza genocide, analyzing the historical roots of the US-Israeli rampage in the Middle East and advancing a socialist strategy to stop it.

The event featured Joseph Kishore, national secretary of the SEP; Jerry White, labor editor of the *World Socialist Web Site*; and David North, the chairman of the WSWS International Editorial Board.

Over the past year, the US media has sought to present the genocide in Gaza as the byproduct of the October 7, 2023 attacks, which are supposedly an inexplicable manifestation of “pure evil.” The entire history of centuries of colonial rule over the Middle East, the legacy of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, the fact that Israel has illegally occupied the Palestinian territory since 1967, and the US wars throughout the region since 1991 have simply been ignored.

Wednesday’s event, however, presented the polar opposite of this simplistic and ahistorical approach, framing the Gaza genocide as the product of the deepening crisis of the capitalist social order, interlinked with every great social and political problem confronting humanity.

In so doing, the event demonstrated the power and burning relevance of the Marxist political method and the history of the Trotskyist movement.

In his initial remarks, Kishore framed the Gaza genocide as part of a broader “normalization of barbarism” by capitalist society. He pointed out that while the official death toll stands at 41,000, the true number may be closer to 200,000, considering those buried under the rubble or killed by starvation and disease. He described the deliberate destruction of Gaza’s educational and healthcare systems, using the term “scholasticide” to refer to the eradication of universities and schools.

This is an expression of a society that has reached a historical dead end: capitalism. One can’t really understand what is happening as simply the expression of individuals who are criminals. All those responsible belong behind bars, but they express a social class and a social system that has reached a historical dead end and has to be overthrown. And that is the central issue which arises from one year of the genocide in Gaza.

In remarks toward the beginning of the meeting, North explained, “All of these events are rooted in history.”

In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States, the principal imperialist power, saw that the time had arrived to reestablish everything as it would have been had it not been for the [1917] October Revolution [in Russia]. To reestablish colonialism, to restore the unfettered domination of the imperialist system all over the world.

North added, “What we are now confronted with is a historical crisis which is rooted essentially in the unviability of the capitalist system, and that itself has deep roots.”

He continued, “Marx once said, ‘To be radical is to go to the roots.’ What is the root of this crisis? How do we situate the present atrocities in a manner which allows us both to understand them and develop effective action to deal with it?”

North noted that millions of people all over the world have protested against the Gaza genocide, but “so far, the protests have remained very much at the level of the expression of moral outrage and have not articulated a clearly defined political program to address the root cause, I mean, that is, to understand what is driving this.”

North reviewed the basic contradictions of the capitalist system identified by Marxists, between world economy and the national state system, and between the social character of production and its domination by private property.

How can these contradictions be resolved? History shows us there are one of two ways. Either they are resolved, as we are seeing, through war, globally and domestically, through dictatorial, even fascist systems of rule, or they are resolved through an uprising of the international working class and the establishment through social revolution of a global federation of humanity tearing down the borders.

Now that’s the great challenge of our time. Which will prevail? Will the tendencies toward destruction prevail, or will the tendencies towards social regeneration prevail?

That is, will the ruling classes achieve their aims through war and mass repression, or will the working class solve the historical problems which it confronts through the overthrow of the capitalist system?

North concluded, “There is no middle-of-the-road reformist answer to the problems of our time.”

A central theme that was developed throughout the meeting was the relationship between the escalation of war abroad and the war on the working class at home, that these are two sides of the same capitalist crisis.

Jerry White pointed to the opposition among autoworkers in Detroit to the genocide. “There’s a deep revulsion among workers. ... I know a Warren Truck [Stellantis assembly plant outside Detroit] worker who in the lunch room asked his fellow workers, ‘Where do you think your tax dollars are going? They’re going to buy missiles to murder the Palestinians.’”

White pointed to the role of the trade union apparatus in attempting to subordinate the working class to the war policy of the ruling elite. He said that it was necessary for workers to connect “their daily struggle against inflation, against plant closings and layoffs, their fight to defend a decent living standard, to restore pensions like at Boeing, to understand that that is intimately connected with the fight against capitalism and against war, because, after all, it’s the very same corporations who are waging a war on workers.”

The speakers stressed that it was the working class that had to be mobilized against imperialism, not one or another capitalist state.

Asked to respond to a question from a listener, who asked, “Will China and Russia intervene on behalf of the Palestinians by supporting Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Iran with advanced armaments?” North replied,

We don’t have a program for world war. We don’t favor and we are not supporters of Russia against the United States or China against the United States. The answer to this lies not in a program of national defense based on existing regimes but on the basis of the international mobilization of the working class.

Developing the theme of the revolutionary role of the working class, Kishore stated that the critical question is: “Is there a social force capable of opposing imperialism?”

The answer, he said, is yes, the international working class:

It has that power objectively, but that power can only be realized through organization, the fight to unify the working class, and above all political perspective and understanding. That has to be developed in the working class.

Toward the end of the meeting, North stated:

The basic question that comes up in one form or another is, can’t you offer a somewhat simpler path? Isn’t there some simpler solution? Well, the question which we would pose in response is, can you think of any serious solution to any of the problems which we confront without a vast transfer of wealth from the heights of capitalist society to the broad mass of people?

Can you conceive of a set of circumstances where the rich, the hyper-rich, the malignantly rich are going to accept any restriction on the accumulation of their wealth? Classes don’t make those sorts of decisions. And in any case, it’s not even a question of their individual desires. It’s a question of the functioning of an economic system. Capitalism strives for domination.

North concluded:

We’re at a point in history where it is possible to effect the most dramatic change in the history of mankind. That’s why, as in every great period, it’s either-or. Either mankind advances or it faces destruction. If the social revolution is impossible, then it means the survival of mankind is impossible.

He urged the audience, “Put aside the search for half-measures, false solutions, and easy paths that don’t require very much of anyone.”

The Gaza genocide has been a defining social experience for an entire generation. Workers and young people have witnessed, in real time, the extermination of an imprisoned and persecuted population by the world’s capitalist “democracies.” The horrific images they have seen have begun to shatter the illusions that held sway over earlier generations, including the belief that the Holocaust of the 20th century was an aberration that could not be repeated.

After one year of genocide in Gaza, there is a growing thirst for a serious and historically grounded analysis of and response to the crisis humanity is passing through. Out of this horrific tragedy, and horrific crime, will come a new audience for the Marxist tradition embodied by the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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