

David North addresses meeting at Frankfurt Book Fair

“If there is to be a future, the working class must reappropriate Marxism”

Our reporters
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On Saturday, October 19, David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, spoke to over 100 attendees of the Frankfurt Book Fair at the Gallus House on the topic “Back to the Future: Fascism, War and Class Struggle in the 21st Century.”

In the preceding weeks, Mehring Verlag, the German-language publishing house of the WSW, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) mounted thousands of posters, distributed tens of thousands of flyers and held hundreds of discussions to promote the important event.

The chairman of the SGP, Christoph Vandreier, immediately made it clear in his introductory remarks why the event had political significance. He said that while American President Biden was in Berlin to talk to Chancellor Scholz about the escalation of the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, North stood for the other America—“for working class America, where opposition to war policies and genocide in Gaza is as widespread as it is here in Europe.”

North, who has been a leading member of the Trotskyist movement for over 50 years, has not only commented on the development of war in recent decades but has actively fought against it. And he has done so “always from the point of view of the development of an international movement of the working class against war and the construction of a revolutionary party that opposes capitalist madness with a socialist perspective.”

North represents the Marxism of the October Revolution and therefore understands the importance of basing revolutionary work on a precise understanding of historical and political developments, as he elaborated in his book *Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the 21st Century*, continued Vandreier. The issue is therefore to focus on clarifying the political issues that North addressed with incomparable clarity in his books, such as *The Logic of Zionism* and *Sounding the Alarm*.

The latter features North’s speeches at May Day rallies over the last 10 years, which, according to Vandreier, “strongly warn against the developments we are currently witnessing.” He continued, “Many did not think it possible that the imperialist powers would once again be prepared to commit genocide, risk nuclear war and ultimately set the whole world ablaze. But that’s exactly what’s happening now.”

North began his remarks by condemning the barbaric warfare of the imperialist powers and Israel. The killing of Hamas leader Yahya

Sinwar, he said, is “yet another example of the utter disintegration of democratic principles within what presents itself as the center of global democracy. This is an objective indication of the breakdown of American and world capitalism, of the so-called democratic order, and the descent of the capitalist world into out-and-out barbarism.”

North pointed out that the first Auschwitz trial took place in the Fritz Bauer Hall, the venue of the meeting, 60 years ago. He stated that the day will come when those responsible for the genocidal war against the people of Gaza will be held accountable for their crimes.

North stressed that Sinwar’s life, like the life of the Palestinian people as a whole, was characterized by oppression. North stated:

He devoted his life to a struggle against that oppression. And he gave his life for that. To that extent, his example is one which should be honored. But at the same time, it is necessary to draw the lessons of the experience of the Palestinian people and of all the oppressed.

The crucial lesson is that there can be no national solution to national oppression apart from the mobilization of the international working class.

North explained:

That is to say, that the most basic lesson of Trotskyism, which is rooted in the theory of permanent revolution, is that the national struggle can only be resolved through the class struggle—that is, only through the conquest of power, the overthrow of the capitalist system and all the atrocities of imperialist barbarism.

The title of the event was deliberately chosen, according to North:

All the horrors that we are observing today, the horrors of genocide, the resurgence of fascism, the danger of war resemble the realities of the 20th century, particularly the first half of the 20th century, and most specifically the 31 years

between 1914 and 1945.

The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East are part of an escalating global conflict over the redivision of the world, he added.

“Back to the future,” he went on to say, also means it is necessary to draw the lessons from the past in order to develop a perspective for the future. “If there is to be a future, the working class and the advanced sections of the youth must regain an understanding of the Marxist analysis of the laws of capitalism,” said North.

The disasters of the 20th century were based not just on evil intentions but on the fundamental contradictions of capitalism: between social production and private appropriation, and between the international character of the production process and the nation-state system. “This is the reason for all the geopolitical conflicts that lead to war,” North continued.

Today, these contradictions are even more explosive than 100 years ago, as the enormous technological progress has further advanced the international integration of production. Every industrial commodity is an international commodity composed of parts from all over the world. At the same time, this creates the basis for the elimination of capitalism.

He continued:

If the capitalists are able to organize production on a world scale to make a profit, why shouldn't the working class be able to organize globally to make the world revolution? The two processes are intimately connected with one another.

As Trotsky noted two months before the outbreak of World War II, there are only two solutions to the global crisis: war or revolution. There was war but also revolutions, which were betrayed by Stalinism and Social Democracy.

North continued:

Now we are in the 21st century and confronted with solving the problems that could not be solved in the last century. There are great dangers, but it is also scientifically proven that the objective conditions exist for overcoming these problems. But this ultimately requires us to solve the one big problem that was not solved in the last century: the problem of the crisis of revolutionary leadership.

In conclusion, he drew attention to the fact that there have been numerous attacks against the International Committee of the Fourth International in the recent period. British historian John Kelly accused the Trotskyists in his book *Twilight of Trotskyism* of having an “all or nothing” attitude and of rejecting the possibility of reformism. “Well, if there is one argument against the perspective of reformism, it is the state of the world political situation,” North said.

An enormous opposition is growing, but there will only be a solution on the basis of Marxism. North concluded with an urgent appeal:

Study, read, understand the laws of development. Turn to the revolutionary force of society, the working class, and build the revolutionary party.

In the ensuing discussion, the speaker answered numerous questions from the audience that revolved around the role of subjective and objective factors in history, the responsibility of capitalism for climate change and the rise of fascism.

Particular attention was paid to the presidential election in the US, where the Socialist Equality Party, the American section of the ICFI, is standing its own candidates. When asked how North would respond to the argument that one must choose the “lesser evil,” he replied that the revolutionary movement advances an alternative to all the parties of capitalist reaction.

With reference to those who thought one had to vote for Harris to prevent Trump, North said one had to ask the question where Trump came from. “He is the product of a political, social, economic and cultural degeneration of our country.”

He stated:

Kamala Harris herself is fully identified with mass murder. Is she the lesser evil? Is the Democratic Party the lesser evil, the party that propagates war against Russia, war against Iran and China? The party of the CIA? Is it the lesser evil?

He went on to stress:

Our politics are not electorally focused. We use elections for a single purpose, to educate the working class and show the workers the bankruptcy of the political system. Our policy is to educate the working class and young people politically and provide them with the necessary understanding in order to conduct a systematic and sustained revolutionary struggle against the existing system.

After the event, lengthy discussions continued at the book stall. Many attendees bought books by David North and left their contact information to help build the Socialist Equality Party.



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