

Sounding the Alarm: Socialism Against War: Foreword to the German edition

Johannes Stern
13 November 2024

We are publishing here the foreword to the German translation of David North's new publication, Sounding the Alarm: Socialism Against War. The German edition, Ein Warnruf: Sozialismus gegen Krieg, will be published in December and can be pre-ordered here. The English edition can be ordered here.

Foreword

The publication of this volume of speeches by David North could hardly be more urgent. Even the bourgeois media and think tanks now discuss the development towards a third world war and the danger of nuclear annihilation. With the genocide in Gaza and the constant escalation of the NATO war in Ukraine against the nuclear-armed power Russia, the imperialist powers are crossing all red lines. In pursuit of their geostrategic and economic goals, they are willing to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of lives and even risk the destruction of the entire planet.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) foresaw this development. When the ICFI and the *World Socialist Web Site* called for their first International Online May Day rally in 2014—one hundred years after the start of World War I—David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the WSW and national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, warned:

Those who believe that war with China and Russia is an impossibility—that the major imperialist powers would not “risk war” with nuclear powers—are deluding themselves. The history of the twentieth century, with its two devastating world wars and its innumerable and very bloody “localized” conflicts, has provided sufficient evidence of the risks the imperialist ruling classes are prepared to take. Indeed, they are prepared to risk the fate of all of humanity and the planet itself.

One hundred years after the outbreak of World War I and 75 years after the start of World War II, the struggle against the danger of a third imperialist cataclysm confronts the international working class.

North's collected speeches on May Day are not analyses and warnings from a passive observer. They are the concentrated expression of the active struggle of the world Trotskyist movement against imperialism and war in the last decade. They are based on the approach that already distinguished the great socialist revolutionaries and opponents of war of the past century—Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and, above all, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Leon Trotsky. They all understood that the same fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system that lead to war—the contradiction between the world economy and the nation-state system and the contradiction between the social character of production and its subordination to private property—also create the objective basis for the social revolution.

This Marxist understanding stands out throughout North's remarks in this volume: the struggle against militarism and war requires a struggle against its root, capitalism. The development of world war and the associated relapse into barbarism can only be stopped if the working class unites internationally and overthrows the capitalist profit system in a socialist revolution. For this, it needs a revolutionary leadership based on the lessons of history and fighting for socialist consciousness. North's speeches are proof that this leadership exists. And they show the strength of the Marxist method, which analyses events in their broader historical and political context, examines the underlying driving forces and class interests, and on this basis develops a perspective for the struggles of the working class.

Contrary to the official narrative of Russian President Vladimir Putin's alleged unprovoked invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, North's speeches provide a clear assessment of the historical, economic, social, and political origins of the war. As early as 2014, when Washington and Berlin organized a far-right coup in Ukraine to install a pro-Western regime in Kiev, North declared:

The plotters in Washington and Berlin understood that this coup would lead to a confrontation with Russia. Indeed, far from seeking to avoid a confrontation, both Germany and the United States believe that a clash with Russia is required for the realization of their far-reaching geopolitical interests.

And specifically on the role of Germany, he said, “[T]he confrontation with Russia is welcomed as a pretext for the repudiation of the constraints on militarism imposed in the wake of the unspeakable crimes committed during the years of Hitler’s Third Reich,” adding, “Definite economic and geopolitical interests” are at stake. As in the 20th century, “Germany is once again gazing longingly upon the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Central Asia and the vast land mass of Russia.”

Israel’s genocide in Gaza is likewise not merely a reaction to the attack by Hamas on October 7, 2023. It is part of the imperialist war offensive, which aims not only to subjugate the entire Middle East, but to redivide the world. In his May Day 2024 speech, North said:

The genocidal violence unleashed by the Israeli state against the Palestinians has aroused the anger of workers and youth all over the world. But it must be recognized that the genocide in Gaza and the war against Russia are interconnected fronts in the global war unleashed by imperialism. The same interests that dictate the policies of Genocide Joe Biden in the Middle East determine the actions of his administration in Central Europe, as well as in Asia.

Another example of the power of Marxist analysis is the ICFI’s response to the coronavirus pandemic. In his May Day 2020 speech, North described the pandemic as a “trigger event” that revealed and enormously accelerated the economic, social and political crisis of the capitalist system. He emphasized that the fight against the pandemic is not only a medical question, but—just like the fight against social inequality, war, fascism and dictatorship—a class and a revolutionary question. In 2024, North also stated:

The indifference to mass death and debilitation since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic in January 2020 is an unanswerable refutation of appeals to the conscience of the capitalist class. It subordinated all concerns for human life to the relentless drive for corporate profits and the accumulation of private wealth. It accepted 27 million excess deaths as a necessary consequence of the operation of the capitalist process of production.

North’s speeches show that the ruling class is reacting to the extreme concentration of wealth and the deep crisis of capitalism as in the 1930s with a turn to authoritarian forms of rule and fascism. The programme of mass infection, inequality and war is incompatible with democratic rights. Trump’s coup attempt on January 6, 2021, his ongoing efforts to build a fascist movement in the US, and the cowardly role of the Democrats who accompany and facilitate this development are only the sharpest expressions of this. In Germany and Europe, too, the ruling class is courting the

extreme right and adopting its programme.

The book is also a polemic against all pseudo-left forces who claim that pressure can be exerted on the imperialist warmongers, and against all those who argue that the capitalist regimes in Russia or China are potential midwives of a new “multipolar” world that will replace the US-dominated “unipolar” world order and create a more just and peaceful future. North says:

This new version of a peaceful “ultra-imperialism” is no more theoretically coherent and politically viable than it was a century ago, when it was first proposed by the German reformist Karl Kautsky and comprehensively refuted by Lenin.

The peaceful division of global resources among the capitalist and imperialist states is impossible, North continues, which is why “the utopian striving” for a peaceful “multipolar” world “leads, in its own twisted logic, to World War III and the destruction of the planet.” “The only politically viable, let alone revolutionary, answer” to the impending catastrophe is “the revolutionary mobilization of the international working class on the basis of socialist policies.”

If you want to stop the return of world war and fascism after the catastrophes of the 20th century, you must read this book. The principles and perspectives of the Trotskyist movement, which North so impressively defends and develops in his speeches, form the basis for building a new revolutionary leadership capable of defeating imperialism and overthrowing capitalism once and for all. Mehring Verlag and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei will do everything in their power to distribute the German-language edition of this book as widely as possible.

Johannes Stern

Editor of the German-language edition of the *World Socialist Web Site*

Berlin, 24 October 2024



To contact the WWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact