

In memory of Wolfgang Weber: A fighter for Trotskyism

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On January 19, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) in Germany held an international event in memory of Wolfgang Weber, who died on November 16, 2024. Wolfgang was an outstanding fighter for Trotskyism and a long-time leading member of the SGP.

The following remarks were delivered to the January 19 meeting by David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site and national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party in the US.

Comrades,

It is, in one sense, difficult to speak at a meeting like this within a short period of time, especially when trying to sum up the significance of Comrade Wolfgang's life.

Comrade Uli and Comrade Christoph have already done an excellent job addressing Wolfgang's political history, which spanned half a century. While, in a broad historical sense, we understand that half a century is not an immense amount of time, it is a vast portion of an individual's life.

My own relationship with Wolfgang spanned nearly that entire 50 years. I first met him in 1975, at a school of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP). He immediately struck me as a comrade of immense intellectual depth.

I was drawn to the movement through the historical struggle waged by Trotsky against the most terrible manifestation of barbarism in the 20th century—the coming to power of the Nazi regime. It was the clarity with which Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement had explained the significance of fascism, and their advanced program that could have stopped Hitler's rise to power, that convinced me of the historical importance of Trotsky's role. This understanding was perhaps even more powerful than his leadership in the October Revolution.

Everything that Peter, Christoph and Uli have said about

the significance of this historical experience for Wolfgang is absolutely true, and it was true for many others as well. As we reflect on Wolfgang's history, I think it's important to note that he conducted his work under extremely difficult conditions for the movement in Germany.

While the British movement and Gerry Healy led the struggle against Pabloism and for the defense of Trotskyism, the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) was already in retreat by the time Wolfgang joined the movement.

One particularly disturbing aspect of this political retreat was the WRP's attitude toward the section in Germany. There are perhaps many reasons for this, but in some strange way, they viewed any serious discussion of the history of Germany as a manifestation of pessimism. They seemed to believe that dwelling on the experiences of the 30s and 40s, the catastrophes of that period, somehow contradicted the argument that the working class was "undefeated."

There was only one occasion when I heard Healy address this issue in a way that was appropriate. It was at a school in the United States and Canada in 1973, when he warned, "We are not going to permit again the destruction of the flower of the working class." But the necessary political and historical clarifications for the development of the German movement were not undertaken. The German comrades, who were young and inexperienced, yet full of determination, were profoundly aware of the tragic history of Germany and the significance of fascism. However, the required political and theoretical work was not encouraged, and this created exceptionally difficult conditions for them.

I sensed that this attitude underlay what seemed to be a hostility from Healy, Banda and Slaughter toward Comrade Wolfgang, which I could never understand. Whenever I spoke with Wolfgang, I was always

impressed by the depth of his knowledge, his political seriousness, his love of history and his immense culture. Having such a comrade was a source of great encouragement for me.

It wasn't until 1981, when I met Comrade Wolfgang again in Essen, and especially after the split in the International Committee, that it became possible to have genuine political collaboration with him.

Much has been said about the political work Wolfgang conducted. I particularly recall his articles and essays, his efforts to explain the nature of the East German state and the betrayal of Stalinism in the GDR (German Democratic Republic). The most enjoyable element of my collaboration with Wolfgang came in the 2000s, when he took the initiative in conducting a fight against the lies of Robert Service.

I remember two episodes that are worth emphasizing. The first was Wolfgang's role in organizing a campaign to sponsor a lecture by Professor Alexander Rabinowitch on the subject of the Russian Revolution. Rabinowitch, a distinguished historian in the United States, had written key works on the history of the Russian Revolution, such as *Prelude to Revolution*, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, and *The Bolsheviks in Power*. Rabinowitch, who spent hours with Wolfgang, later commented that he considered Wolfgang one of the most brilliant people he had ever met.

Wolfgang's depth of interest and knowledge in Rabinowitch's work had a profound impact on him, especially at a time when Rabinowitch's historical approach was being increasingly sidelined by the postmodernist trends that dismissed careful historical narrative and Marxist perspectives. Wolfgang played an enormous role in guiding and supporting Rabinowitch during his tour, representing the party very well.

I also remember the meeting at which Alexander Rabinowitch spoke. It was so significant that *Der Spiegel* published a major article about it. Over 400 people attended, despite attempts to sabotage the meeting. Wolfgang's seriousness and the work he carried out in the fight to clarify the historical questions of the 20th century, particularly the nature of fascism, remain a source of immense relevance.

Another major contribution by Comrade Wolfgang was his initiative to prevent the publication of Robert Service's biography of Trotsky in German. Wolfgang contacted leading historians in Germany and Austria, persuading them to oppose the publication. His efforts were successful in blocking the German release of the

book for over one year, and by the time it was eventually published, the book was largely discredited. This was a great political victory for the International Committee and significantly strengthened our intellectual presence.

Tomorrow, one of the most degrading events in American history will take place: the inauguration of a convicted criminal, a gangster, charlatan and social trash as president of the United States. Just four years after attempting to overthrow the Constitution on a fascistic basis, Donald Trump will again be inaugurated as president. We wrote, some 23 years ago, that the United States had a rendezvous with disaster. Tomorrow, that rendezvous will be fulfilled.

The presidency of Donald Trump marks the beginning of the end for American capitalism. The American bourgeoisie has forfeited all political and historical credibility with this event. Many are responsible for this: not just the political right or the capitalist system, but also American liberalism, the Democratic Party, the pseudo-left, the cowardly academic community, the media and the corrupt business culture.

Now, it is left to the working class to stop this, and that will happen.

As we honor the life of Comrade Wolfgang, we must also be mindful of our historical task. The fight against fascism is not only about clarifying the past but about mobilizing our movement for the tasks we face in the future. Had Comrade Wolfgang lived a few more years, he would have been fully engaged in this struggle. He was a great champion of Trotskyism, a defender of historical truth, an implacable foe of capitalism and a fighter against the barbarism it represents.

So, in bidding farewell to Comrade Wolfgang, I assure all who honor his memory that we will carry forward this fight to its necessary conclusion.

Long live the memory of Comrade Wolfgang Weber.



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