

On the 85th anniversary of Trotsky's assassination

Remarks to the Third International Commemoration of Leon Trotsky held on Prinkipo

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The World Socialist Web Site and Mehring Yay?nc?l?k (Books), in collaboration with the Adalar (Princes' Islands) Municipality, held a commemoration event titled "The 85th Anniversary of the Assassination of Leon Trotsky: Historical Significance and Enduring Consequences" on the island of Büyükdada (Prinkipo), Turkey, on Saturday, August 16.

The main speaker at the event was David North, chairman of the WSWs International Editorial Board. An online interview was held with North on the circumstances surrounding the assassination of Trotsky and the ongoing investigation into "Security and the Fourth International," which was initiated by the International Committee of the Fourth International in 1975. The interview will be published on the WSWs in the coming days.

The opening speech was delivered by Ali Ercan Akpolat, Adalar mayor, followed by a speech by artist Gülhan about her exhibition "Trotsky's Path," which was opened at the event venue.

Below, we publish the remarks delivered by Ula? Ate?çi, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Group, prior to the interview.

Dear guests,

My name is Ula? Ate?çi. I am an editor at Mehring Yay?nc?l?k and the *World Socialist Web Site*, which contributed to the organization of this event. I would like to welcome you all once again. It is an honor to have the opportunity to speak before you today at this significant event.

First, I would like to thank the Adalar Municipality, led by Ali Ercan Akpolat, for hosting "The Third International Leon Trotsky Commemoration" event, and Gülhan for opening the exhibition "Trotsky's Path" here.

On this island, which served as a home to this great Russian revolutionary—or, more accurately, to the "world revolutionary," because of his Theory of Permanent Revolution and political legacy—between 1929 and 1933, we now have an intellectual event of international significance that has become a tradition. And the restoration of the Trotsky House on the island in a manner befitting this great revolutionary and its transformation into a cultural center accessible to workers, youth and intellectuals from all over the world will be an initiative of great importance.

The presence of the exiled leader of the world revolution here, as we stated in the title of the first commemoration event two years ago, has placed this island at the center of world history.

Those who followed Trotsky closely were not only agents of the Stalinist secret police, the GPU. Trotsky maintained constant correspondence and meetings with the leaders of the International Left Opposition, which emerged in opposition to the political degeneration of the Stalinized Comintern. Trotsky's writings were closely followed not only in Moscow but also in the capitals of America and Europe and rest of the world. Trotsky wrote some of his most important works here: his autobiography *My Life*, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, and his essays warning against the rise of Nazism in Germany, showing the way to prevent Hitler's victory. They have been collected in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*.

In Mexico, his final place of exile where he was assassinated, Trotsky wrote in 1938 the founding document of the Fourth International, warning, "Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind." Trotsky would have had no difficulty understanding the conditions of today, where the culture of mankind is threatened by fascism, genocide and nuclear war. And indeed, with each passing year, we witness the escalation of these catastrophes brought about by the imperialist-capitalist system.

David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, said the following in his speech here on August 25 last year:

Nearly 80 years after the collapse of Hitler's Third Reich and the end of World War II, we are witnessing the revival of fascism, the utilization of genocide as an instrument of state policy and the escalation of military conflicts toward a nuclear third world war.

Just months after this speech, fascist Donald Trump returned to the White House in the United States. He is attempting to establish a presidential dictatorship by disregarding the Constitution in a country of two great democratic revolutions.

The genocide launched by Israel against the Palestinians in Gaza, with the support of the US and NATO, in October 2023 continues to intensify and is still ongoing in the form of mass starvation, ethnic cleansing and massacres. As part of the plan to establish a "New

Middle East” under full US control, we witnessed an imperialist attack by the US and Israel against our neighbor Iran last June.

The US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine and preparations for a war against China continue. The danger of a nuclear conflict between major powers is growing every day. All of this is accompanied by the growth of global social opposition against genocide, imperialist war, social counter-revolution and authoritarian regimes as well as the sharpening of class struggles.

Turkey is not immune from these global events. On the contrary, it stands out as an important epicenter of conflicts and tensions. Here in Istanbul, where we are commemorating Trotsky today, it has been five months since Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Republican People’s Party’s (CHP) elected mayor of Istanbul and leading presidential candidate in the polls, was arrested and sent to prison. This wave of political arrests, which includes Adalar Municipal Council Member Nesimi Aday and many others, triggered a mass movement that spread across the country in the second half of March.

Large numbers of young people and workers took to the streets to defend their basic democratic rights, including the right to vote and be elected, the right to a fair trial, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and demonstration and freedom of the press. The deteriorating living conditions caused by the ruling class’s social attacks amid the genocide in Gaza and the escalating global war, along with growing discontent and anxiety about the future, were also among the factors that triggered this social explosion. On this occasion, without hiding the political differences between us, I would like to reiterate once again the demand for the release of all political prisoners, a demand of millions of people.

The truth is that the contradictions that led to the October Revolution of 1917 and the international revolutionary wave that followed are today much more acute on a global scale. It should be added that the strategists of the imperialist and capitalist regimes see new revolutionary social explosions not only as possible but as inevitable, and they are prepared to resort to any means to prevent the success of the Bolsheviks from being repeated.

Trotsky, alongside Vladimir Lenin, led the October Revolution of 1917, which opened a new chapter in human history. He was forcibly exiled to Turkey less than 12 years after the revolution by the bureaucratic regime led by Stalin, which had seized power from the Soviet working class.

The political significance of Trotsky’s expulsion from the ruling Communist Party, the Communist International and the USSR cannot be overstated. Alongside Lenin, he was the most resolute defender and embodiment of socialist internationalism and the program of the world socialist revolution, which formed the political and ideological foundations of the revolution. The critical role he played in the October uprising was acknowledged by Stalin himself on the anniversary of the revolution. He founded and led the Red Army, which defeated the counterrevolutionary forces supported by imperialism. He guided the Communist International, established as the center of the world socialist revolution, alongside Lenin at its first four congresses. In the Soviet republics and around the world, two names were most often mentioned when talking about the young Bolshevik regime: Lenin and Trotsky. The new government was often referred to as the Lenin-Trotsky government.

Just as the revolutionary upsurge of the working class in Russia and internationally—and the leadership’s response to it—brought Lenin and Trotsky, who had been in exile abroad for years, to power in a short period of time in 1917, so too must Trotsky’s removal from power be

understood in a broader context. His exile to Turkey and eventual assassination on August 20, 1940 by a Stalinist agent cannot be separated from the international class struggles, revolutions and counter-revolutions, and the role of leaderships.

Stalinism, which Trotsky defined as an “agency of imperialism within the labour movement,” served imperialism by assassinating Trotsky, who represented the danger of the world socialist revolution. This assassination, which marked the culmination of the political genocide that began in the USSR in 1936 and resulted in the murder of hundreds of thousands of socialist intellectuals and workers, was not only welcomed with great satisfaction by Stalin, the “grave digger of the revolution,” but also by Hitler and other imperialist leaders, under the conditions of the outbreak of World War II.

Although the Stalinist regime succeeded in sneakily murdering Trotsky, it failed to destroy the Fourth International, which Trotsky called for in 1933 from Prinkipo and led in its founding in 1938. Nor did it succeed in eliminating the struggle for world socialism.

David North, whom we are hosting here for the third time today, has been a leading member of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) for nearly 50 years. The ICFI has been ensuring the political continuity of this movement and struggle since 1953.

North played the leading role in the “Security and the Fourth International” investigation launched by the ICFI in May 1975, which was the first comprehensive and systematic investigation into the circumstances surrounding the assassination of Trotsky. Today we will talk with him about the assassination of Trotsky and this ongoing historical investigation.

David North’s activities as a revolutionary journalist, historian, and political leader in the international workers’ movement and the Trotskyist movement span 55 years. A political authority on Leon Trotsky, North, among others, is the author of *Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the Twenty-First Century*, *Leon Trotsky and the Development of Marxism*, and *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, published in Turkey by Mehving Yayınları, as well as *The Logic of Zionism: From Nationalist Myth to the Gaza Genocide*, *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*, and *The Heritage We Defend: A Contribution to the History of the Fourth International*.



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