

The genocide in Gaza and the threat of a third world war

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This speech was delivered by Peter Schwarz, member of the International Editorial Board of the WSW, on November 2 at an event organised by Mehring Verlag at the Left Literature Fair in Nuremberg.

The city of Nuremberg had previously threatened to ban the event if the description of Israel's actions in Gaza as "genocide" and the condemnation of the German government's war policy were not removed from the text announcing the meeting. Mehring Verlag protested against this with a leaflet, which it distributed to all visitors at the book fair. The response was overwhelming. Around 120 visitors crowded into the completely overfilled cinema hall to listen to the lecture and protest against censorship. The publishers at the book fair also unanimously passed a resolution against the censorship.

Eighty years ago, on 20 November 1945, the trial of the main Nazi war criminals began in the Nuremberg Palace of Justice, just three kilometers from here. Leading politicians, military personnel and officials of the Nazi regime stood trial before the International Military Tribunal, which had been set up specifically for this purpose, accused of crimes against peace (for planning and waging a war of aggression), crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The trial broke new legal ground: the principle of "Nulla poena sine lege," which states that an act may only be punished if its criminality was already established by law at the time of the act, was partially suspended. This move appeared inevitable, however, given the scale of the crimes committed by the Nazis.

The trials were intended to expose these crimes to the world and ensure that nothing similar would ever happen again. Important principles of international criminal law, which were later enshrined in the UN Charter and international law, can be traced back to the Nuremberg trials.

The memorial plaque that stands in front of the courtroom today reads:

In Nuremberg, the International Military Tribunal implemented the idea of an "International Criminal Court" for the first time. The principles developed at that time became known as the "Nuremberg Principles" and formed the basis of modern international criminal justice. It was, however, only with the Rome Statute of 1998 and the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague that the demand for a permanent legal authority for international criminal law was fulfilled...

We know, of course, that this law has largely remained on paper. There has been no shortage of war crimes that have gone unpunished over the last 80 years. Just think of the Vietnam War or the Iraq War. Nevertheless, it must be said that the scale of such crimes has taken on a new dimension.

As Katja Rippert mentioned at the beginning, the city of Nuremberg censored the text announcing our meeting and threatened to ban it if we did not delete the phrases "genocide in Gaza" and "war crimes of the

German government." One of the reasons given was that the description of Israel's actions in Gaza as "genocide" relativises historical crimes. This is, to say the least, a strange argument.

The city does not address the question of whether Israel's actions against the Palestinians constitute genocide. It ignores the facts, the legal opinions, and the statements of renowned human rights organisations and international institutions that prove this. Instead, it declares that this question should not even be asked—let alone answered—because to do so relativises the Holocaust.

This turns the significance of the Nuremberg Trials on its head. They were intended to ensure that genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes would never again be committed—and that those responsible for such crimes would face severe punishment.

Now the city of Nuremberg is saying that such crimes should not be named and prosecuted because this would relativise the crimes of the Nazis. It is thus transforming the Nuremberg Trials from a weapon against war crimes into a general amnesty for them. A crime can no longer be called a crime because doing so relativises another crime.

Genocide in Gaza

The fact that the Israeli government is committing genocide in Gaza is undisputed in the eyes of the vast majority of the world's population. Millions have taken to the streets in London, Jakarta, New York, Berlin and hundreds of other cities to protest against it.

The International Criminal Court, which the city describes on the memorial plaque in the Palace of Justice as the embodiment of the "Nuremberg Principles" and whose authority is recognised by Germany, issued an arrest warrant a year ago against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his then Defence Minister Yoav Galant. They are accused of serious war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The Israeli army dropped 18,000 tonnes of bombs on Gaza in the first seven weeks of the conflict. Since then, there have been no reliable figures. If this amount has remained constant, the total would now stand at 275,000 tonnes of explosives—the equivalent of 18 Hiroshima bombs. They exploded in an area that covers just one percent of Bavaria and is home to more than 2 million people.

Hospitals, universities, schools and mosques were deliberately destroyed; 90 percent of all homes lie in ruins; multi-storey buildings were deliberately collapsed—often without the residents being able to leave in time. Doctors, paramedics, aid workers and over 200 journalists were killed—more than in any other armed conflict. Journalists reporting on these crimes from Gaza are risking their lives. Journalists from international media are not allowed in at all.

Let me add that the latest so-called "peace agreement" does not change

this.

The last surviving Israeli hostages have been released, but the killing continues unabated. Hardly a day goes by without Israel bombing targets in Gaza killing dozens of people. The supply of food and medicine is once again being restricted after brief openings to allow food in.

Even if the fighting were to come to a halt, the “eternal peace” announced by Trump would resemble a graveyard: Gaza would be transformed into a protectorate under the supervision of Donald Trump and the British war criminal Tony Blair. The Israeli army would continue to occupy the border and a significant area of the Gaza Strip. And the Palestinians would not have the slightest democratic rights.

But let us return to Israel’s actions. Since the Hamas attack, anyone in Germany who criticises Israel’s warfare is denounced as antisemitic.

Artists have been banned from performing, academics have been dismissed, and numerous demonstrators have been beaten and arrested for showing their solidarity with Palestine. Although Germany’s Basic Law guarantees freedom of expression and expressly prohibits censorship, there is—as in the days of the German Empire—an officer of the political police present at every pro-Palestinian rally to censor banners and leaflets before they are allowed to be distributed.

The persecution of opponents of the Gaza war as antisemites also serves as a lever to eliminate democratic rights in Germany and establish a police state. It is not surprising that the AfD—which is teeming with genuine antisemites—enthusiastically supports this course.

Antisemites are not those who denounce the crimes of Netanyahu and the Zionist state, but those who hold Jews collectively responsible for these crimes. Antisemites are those who claim that the Zionist state acts in the interests of Judaism as a whole.

This is refuted by the fact that numerous Jews around the world are participating in demonstrations in defence of the Palestinians and rejecting the crimes of the Israeli government. The issue becomes even clearer when examined historically.

The Logic of Zionism, from Nationalist Myth to the Gaza Genocide

In this context, I warmly recommend the book *The Logic of Zionism, from Nationalist Myth to the Gaza Genocide*, which we are presenting in this meeting.

The author, David North, is editor-in-chief of the WSWS and chairman of the SEP in the United States. He has been active in the socialist movement for over 50 years and has written numerous books on political and theoretical issues.

As he recounts in this book, North himself has Jewish roots. Many members of his family were murdered in the Holocaust. Before the First World War and during the Weimar Republic, his grandfather was one of Germany’s leading conductors and composers. He managed to flee to the United States in time, where he founded the first black classical orchestra. But his career was subsequently ruined.

North demonstrates that the Zionist project, as he writes, was “based from its origins on a reactionary ideology and a reactionary program.” Until the German catastrophe, a large proportion of Jewish workers and intellectuals linked their own emancipation to the overcoming of capitalist class society and oriented themselves towards the Marxist movement.

The social democratic and later also the communist parties had a high proportion of Jewish members. These parties also played a leading role in the fight against antisemitism—as did the French socialist Jean Jaurès in the Dreyfus affair.

This was also the real reason for Hitler’s antisemitism. “It was not Rothschild, the capitalist, but Karl Marx, the Socialist, who kindled Adolf

Hitler’s anti-Semitism,” writes Konrad Heiden, who wrote one of the first biographies of Hitler. For the same reason, Hitler agitated against the “Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy.”

The Zionism developed by Theodor Herzl in the 1890s was directly opposed to this socialist perspective. He countered the internationalism of the socialist labour movement with the establishment of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine.

Herzl did this at a time when the nation-state, whose development was closely linked to the bourgeois revolution, no longer played a progressive role. The First World War, which broke out in 1914, was an expression of this fact. Its fundamental cause was the incompatibility of the world economy with the nation-state, which the capitalists attempted to overcome through a violent redivision of the world.

From the outset, it was clear to the Zionists that their project of a “Jewish state” required the violent expulsion of the Palestinian population and could only succeed if it was supported by imperialist powers, if one or more major powers could be convinced that a Zionist state would serve their imperialist interests in the region.

In this context, North quotes Vladimir Jabotinsky, the leader of the ultra-right wing of the Zionist movement and mentor of the later Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who wrote in 1934:

I need not dwell on the well-known truism of Palestine’s importance from the viewpoint of British imperial interests; I have only to add that its validity depends on one paramount condition: namely that Palestine should cease being an Arab country.

The Second World War undermined the Zionist alliance with British imperialism, which was reorienting itself in the Middle East. Some Zionists responded with terrorist attacks on British institutions. In 1946, for example, a bomb attack by the Zionist underground organisation Irgun on the King David Hotel, the headquarters of the British Mandate, killed 91 people and injured dozens more.

North’s book states:

But the alliance with imperialism continued. Israel, following its establishment in 1948, functioned as an essential ally of British and French imperialism’s struggle against the rising tide of Arab nationalism. In 1956, Israel joined Britain and France in an invasion of Egypt aimed at overthrowing the nationalist regime led by Nasser and regaining control of the Suez Canal. However, after the United States compelled Britain and France to end the war and withdraw their forces from Egypt, Israel prioritized its relationship with American imperialism.

The founding of the Israeli state was accompanied by extreme violence. Zionist militias massacred well over 100 (some sources say 250) villagers in Deir Yassin in order to spread fear and terror and drive out 750,000 Palestinians—about half of the population of Palestine at the time.

For two years, outrage over the Hamas attack has been constantly fuelled. What is being ignored is that it was Zionism that brought terror as a method of struggle to the Middle East. Among the victims of Zionist terror were British officials at the King David Hotel, the inhabitants of Deir Yassin and numerous other villages, as well as the United Nations mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte, who was killed in 1948. The murder was ordered by Yitzhak Shamir, who later served as Israeli Prime Minister from 1983 to 1992, with a brief interruption.

North summarises:

The maintenance of a Jewish apartheid state, violently suppressing the Palestinian people while at the same time veering toward fascism within Israel itself, is inextricably connected to its role as a linchpin of imperialism in the Middle East.

It is clear that American support for Israel had nothing to do with sympathy for the Jews or reparations for the Holocaust. The US, which closed its borders to Jewish refugees during World War II, continued to restrict the admission of Jews to its universities until the 1960s. And there are numerous antisemites in Trump's MAGA movement. The US arms Israel—on this both Republicans and Democrats agree—because it needs and uses it to dominate the Middle East.

The same applies to Germany. We recently reviewed the book *Israel and German State Reason* by historian Daniel Marwecki on the WSWS.

Marwecki shows that the close cooperation between Germany and Israel had nothing to do with “reparations,” atonement for the Shoah or anything similar. It was a mutual arrangement: Germany supplied the beleaguered Zionist state with weapons, economic and financial aid; in return, the Israeli government turned a blind eye to the continued presence of Nazi elites in the state and economy of the Federal Republic and helped it gain international prestige.

This has remained the case. Germany is Israel's second largest arms supplier after the United States. In recent years, it has supplied about 30 to 47 percent of all Israeli arms imports, including anti-tank missiles, warships, rockets and engines for tanks, as well as important components for land vehicles and naval equipment. In return, Israel serves Germany—like the United States—as a bridgehead for its imperialist interests in the Middle East.

Our movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International, defends Palestinian workers and youth in their struggle against oppression. But this oppression cannot be overcome by a two-state solution.

The creation of a purely Palestinian state alongside a purely Jewish state would inevitably perpetuate the conflict and lead to a new wave of expulsions. Such a state would be economically unviable and a puppet in the hands of the imperialist powers and their reactionary allies in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other Arab states.

The entire history of national movements—from the PLO in Palestine to the LTTE in Sri Lanka to the Kurdish PKK, to name but a few—shows that they have no solution for the oppressed masses. They have either failed miserably or turned into henchmen of one imperialist power or another.

National oppression today—like any form of oppression—can only be overcome through the independent struggle of the international working class with the perspective of socialist revolution. David North's book states:

The great historical and political paradox of the present situation is this: The Israeli working class cannot defend its own democratic rights without fighting for the democratic rights of the Palestinian people against Zionist oppression. And the Palestinians cannot achieve their aspirations for democratic rights and social equality without forging a fighting alliance with the Israeli working class. The only viable perspective is not a mythical “two-state solution,” but a unified socialist state of Jewish and Arab workers.

No matter how heroic the struggle of the Palestinians, the intolerable conditions they confront will not be resolved without the development of an international movement of the working class for socialism.

This is a huge and difficult task, but it is the only realistic solution. Its significance becomes clearer when one considers the war in Gaza in its international context.

Sounding the Alarm: Socialism Against War

This brings me to the second book we want to present today: *Sounding the Alarm: Socialism Against War*. It contains 10 May Day speeches delivered by David North between 2014 and 2024. They trace the dramatic escalation of imperialist militarism, the growing danger of a third World War and the rise of Donald Trump.

They show that the same contradictions to which the ruling class responds with war and dictatorship also create the objective conditions for the intensification of the class struggle and for socialist revolution. The entry of the American and European working class into bitter class struggles is a factor that will dramatically change the entire world situation.

The Middle East is only one front in a rapidly escalating third World War. Other fronts are the war in Ukraine and the encirclement of China by the US and its allies. The cause of these escalating wars is—as in the First and Second World Wars—the incompatibility of the bourgeois nation-state with the international character of the world economy. The imperialist powers are no longer satisfying their hunger for raw materials, markets and cheap labour through peaceful competition, but through a violent redivision of the world.

Lenin already demonstrated this brilliantly in his book on imperialism, written during the First World War. It is definitely worth reading this book again today.

The driving force behind this development towards war is the USA. It emerged from the two world wars as the dominant imperialist power and is attempting to compensate for its relative economic decline by using its military superiority. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which had set certain limits on its imperialist ambitions, the USA has been at war practically without interruption: in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq again, Libya, Syria and Ukraine.

The rise of Donald Trump, this gangster from the real estate and gambling industry, must be seen in this context. He is waging war on the working class at home and escalating wars abroad. The 2,000-pound bombs that Israel is dropping on Gaza all bear the inscription “Made in the USA.” In total, the US has supplied Israel with some 15,000 different bombs over the past two years. Israel could not wage war for a single day longer without the political, financial and military support of the US.

Washington considers China to be its most important adversary and is systematically preparing for war against it. The genocide in Gaza must be seen in this context. The Palestinians, Iran and its allies are an obstacle to imperialist efforts to bring this energy-rich, strategically important region under imperialist control. China imports large quantities of oil and natural gas from the region, and some of its most important export routes run through it.

I will discuss the war in Ukraine in a moment.

The US and its allies are building the largest military force in history against China. US military spending now amounts to \$1 trillion (1,000 billion) a year. That is 37 percent of global military spending. A large part of this total goes towards modernising the nuclear arsenal.

The US is not prepared to accept China overtaking it economically. It is forming a ring of military allies around China, including Japan, Australia and several East Asian countries. High-ranking US generals have openly stated that they expect a war with China within the next five years. The Republicans and Democrats are united on this issue.

Germany, too, is preparing for war and arming itself in a manner unseen since Hitler. It is not doing so because it is a “vassal” of the US, as Oskar Lafontaine and the Wagenknecht party claim, but because it is pursuing its own imperialist goals. Germany’s ruling class has never come to terms with the fact that it had to take a back seat militarily after the failure of Hitler’s war of annihilation. This is most clearly evident in the war in Ukraine.

As with all imperialist wars, not a word of the official propaganda should be believed. The German media, especially the so-called “public” media, have, at the latest since the war in Ukraine, degenerated into propaganda instruments of a government that no longer tolerate dissent.

This war did not start because a diabolical villain by the name of Putin first occupied Crimea and then invaded Ukraine. Nor does it serve to defend “Western values” (whatever that means) and democracy. It is the result of NATO’s continued eastward expansion after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, contrary to all assurances, and its encirclement of Russia. Putin had long threatened a military response if NATO integrated Ukraine, Georgia and other countries into its military structures. NATO knew this and deliberately provoked the Russian invasion.

This is not an insignificant issue. At the end of the Second World War, Stalin had negotiated a “buffer zone” controlled by the Soviet Union after Germany’s war of extermination had cost the lives of 27 million Soviet citizens. These issues are deeply rooted in the collective consciousness of the Russian people. But while the German government constantly refers to Germany’s responsibility for the Holocaust in the Middle East, the responsibility for the siege of Leningrad, which claimed 1.1 million lives, and for the murder of millions of Russian partisans, Jews, forced labourers and prisoners of war apparently plays no role.

We also know how the US government reacted when the Soviet Union stationed missiles in Cuba—a sovereign country—in 1962. It risked nuclear war. And we can imagine how the current US government would react if Mexico signed a military pact with China and stationed Chinese troops in the country. American troops would cross the Rio Grande the next day, and Mexico City would lie in ruins.

Germany played a central role in the preparation and escalation of the war in Ukraine. We are not just saying this today. In 2013, we closely followed how more than 50 leading politicians, journalists, academics, military personnel and business representatives, as part of a project by the government-affiliated German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) and the Washington-based think tank German Marshall Fund (GMF), developed a new foreign policy strategy, which was then implemented by the new federal government—a grand coalition of the CDU/CSU and SPD.

The paper was entitled “New Power—New Responsibility. Elements of a German foreign and security policy for a changing world.” “With the document, the German bourgeoisie is returning to militarist, great power politics following two world wars and horrific crimes,” we wrote at the time.

The overthrow of the elected Ukrainian President Yanukovich, which was accompanied on site by then Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, was the first practical test of this strategy. Yanukovich was not overthrown by a peaceful Maidan revolution, but by fascist militias such as the Right Sector, which glorify former Nazi collaborators such as Stepan Bandera and wear Nazi insignia. At the time, Steinmeier met personally with the leader of the far-right Svoboda party, Oleh Tyahnybok.

Following the coup, the Ukrainian army collapsed completely. Germany and NATO began to build and arm a new army. Meanwhile, fascist militias, mostly financed from the private coffers of Ukrainian oligarchs, held their ground in Russian-dominated eastern Ukraine, terrorising the population and keeping the war going. Russia responded by attacking

Ukraine.

With this war, Germany is pursuing two main goals that it had already pursued and failed to achieve in the two world wars: economic dominance in Eastern Europe and Ukraine with its valuable raw materials. There are now numerous agreements and treaties that leave no doubt about the real interests at stake. The second goal is the subjugation and destruction of Russia.

That is why almost unlimited sums are being spent on supporting Ukraine and military rearmament, for which the working population will ultimately have to foot the bill. Hitler had tried to dominate Europe in order to rule the world. Faced with the global crisis of the capitalist system, trade war and growing social conflicts, the German bourgeoisie is now following the same path again.

Our rejection of the war policies of the British government and NATO does not mean that we support Putin. David North explains this very well in his May Day speech on May 1, 2022:

The imperialist character of the war being waged by NATO does not justify, from the standpoint of the international working class, the decision of the Russian government to invade Ukraine. The International Committee condemns the invasion as politically reactionary. The Putin government’s decision to invade has killed and injured thousands of innocent Ukrainians who are in no way responsible for the policies of the corrupt Kyiv government, divided the Russian and Ukrainian working class, and played into the hands of the imperialist strategists in Washington. ... It has provided German imperialism with the opportunity to massively rearm.

The dangers that now confront Russia are, in the final analysis, the consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 by the Stalinist bureaucracy and the restoration of capitalism. ...

The warnings of Leon Trotsky, brilliantly elaborated in his 1936 treatise, *The Revolution Betrayed*, have been vindicated. Capitalist restoration has resulted in the impoverishment of large sections of the Russian population, the replacement of the bureaucratic regime with dictatorial oligarchic rule and the imminent threat of Russia’s breakup into semi-colonial statelets controlled by imperialist powers.

The fact that the Putin regime could not find an answer to the dangers confronting Russia other than by invading Ukraine, and now threatening a nuclear response to NATO’s provocations, testifies to the political bankruptcy of the regime of capitalist restoration. The Russian capitalist oligarchy, whose wealth is derived from the systematic plundering of the nationalized property of the workers’ state, repudiated all that was progressive in the social and political foundations of the Soviet Union. ...

Putin, a bitter enemy of socialism and the heritage of the October Revolution, is incapable of making any genuinely democratic and progressive appeal to the Ukrainian working class. Instead, he invokes the reactionary legacy of tsarist and Stalinist Great Russian chauvinism.

We oppose NATO’s war by fighting for the unity of Ukrainian and Russian workers and the overthrow and expropriation of the oligarchs on both sides of the border.

Our Ukrainian comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk has been in a Ukrainian prison for over a year, where he is denied even essential dental treatment, because he stands for this perspective. President Zelensky, whose term of office expired long ago, defends “democracy”—i.e., the rule of the corrupt oligarchs—by suppressing media, parties and people who oppose the

NATO war. He sends armed gangs through the streets to force young men to the front as cannon fodder.

We are fighting against NATO's war by mobilising the working class in Germany, the United States and all other imperialist countries against it. The objective conditions for this are developing rapidly. The relentless attack on wages, social benefits, jobs and democratic rights necessary to make society "fit for war" is provoking resistance and fierce class struggles.

The "No Kings" demonstrations in the United States, in which 7 million people participated, are a harbinger of this development. Its success requires a break with the American Democrats, their left wing, the DSA, the German Left Party and all other organisations that express limited criticism of war policy and social attacks, only to create the illusion that pressure from the streets can force the ruling class to change course.

The real task of these parties and their leaders, such as Bernie Sanders in the US, Jeremy Corbyn in Britain and Heidi Reichinnek here in Germany, is to absorb resistance and prevent it from being directed against capitalist class society. When they come to power, such figures, such as Alexis Tsipras in Greece, do the dirty work for the capitalists.

The success of the resistance to war and social cuts also requires a break with the trade union apparatuses, which support trade wars, war policies and the shift to war production, organise job cuts and wage reductions in the workplaces and suppress any resistance to them.

The International Committee of the Fourth International has taken the initiative to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and calls for the establishment of action committees in all workplaces and neighbourhoods to organise the struggle against social cuts and political repression.

I would like to conclude my presentation with the final paragraphs, from the book presented here, of the May Day speech of 2023:

The dangers confronting humanity should not be minimized. The first responsibility of a genuine revolutionary is to state what is. But this requires the recognition that objective reality presents not only the danger of World War III and the annihilation of humanity but also the potential for world socialist revolution and a stupendous advance in human civilization.

The program of the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution led by the International Committee, is to realize this potential by building a mass movement against imperialist war and fighting for the transfer of power to the working class to build socialism throughout the world. This is the perspective that animates, despite all difficulties and dangers, today's celebration of May Day.



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