

London meeting marks 40 years since the expulsion of the Workers Revolutionary Party

Our reporters
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On Saturday, March 15, the Socialist Equality Party (UK) hosted a public meeting at Birkbeck, University of London under the title “Trotskyism and the Fight for Revolutionary Leadership”. The event marked the 40th anniversary of the historic struggle within the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) against the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) leadership and was attended by workers and youth from across the UK.

The meeting was addressed by a panel of speakers, including David North, chairperson of the *World Socialist Web Site* and of the Socialist Equality Party of the United States. As the leader of the US Workers League, forerunner of the US SEP, North played the leading role in the struggle against the political degeneration of the WRP leadership and its concerted efforts to destroy the world Trotskyist movement.

The WRP’s expulsion from the ICFI in the mid-1980s was a defining moment in the history of the international socialist movement. At stake was the survival of Trotskyism, of revolutionary Marxism as an organised political tendency.

The ranks of organised Trotskyism came under relentless assault in the 20th century, above all from the Stalinist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and then from the revisionist tendency known as Pabloism, which demanded that the Trotskyist movement was liquidated into the Stalinist, reformist and bourgeois nationalist movements.

For several decades, the British Trotskyist movement, led by Gerry Healy, Cliff Slaughter and Mike Banda, led the way in the fight against these tendencies. By the 1980s, however, after a protracted period of political backsliding of an opportunist and nationalist character, they had abandoned and then betrayed the key theoretical conquests and principles of Marxism and

Trotskyism.

The ICFI majority’s struggle against the WRP, led by the Workers League, secured a decisive victory over these political pressures and hostile class forces.

It prepared the way for a renaissance of Marxist thought, including an unparalleled analysis of globalisation, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism, and the wave of anti-socialist renunciationism which swept across the social democratic parties and trade unions.

This laid the foundations for the foundation of the Socialist Equality Parties and of the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS).

On the panel to explain these events were comrades Chris Marsden, National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (UK), Peter Schwarz, Secretary of the ICFI, and comrade North.

Marsden, a leading member of the internationalist faction of the WRP that sided with the ICFI during the 1985-86 split, described how “The opportunist essence of the WRP’s politics emerged most clearly in its abandonment of the theory of Permanent Revolution and its strategy of World Socialist Revolution...

“In place of this internationalist strategy for the building of Trotskyist parties worldwide, the WRP evolved its own ‘foreign policy’ whose purpose was to gather the material resources necessary to finance the work of the party in Britain. This centred on forming unprincipled relations with various bourgeois regimes in the Middle East.”

Within the UK, the WRP had first “adapted itself to the spontaneous anti-Tory sentiment in the working class” then “made an ultra-left turn” which “reflected a historic class shift taking place within the party, in which the loss of working class members reinforced the domination of the politically untrained petty-bourgeois

forces catapulted into central leadership positions.”

Ignorant of the party’s long struggle to project a proletarian orientation and win workers to a revolutionary perspective,” these forces “gave support for an ultra-left line that left the labour and trade union bureaucracy unchallenged.”

Schwarz described the intervention against the WRP’s degeneration led by David North.

He began by explaining the “burning topicality” of “the theoretical, political and programmatic issues that the ICFI fought out, clarified, in its confrontation with the WRP.”

“Over the past four decades,” said Schwarz, “all the political forces that kept the working class and the oppressed masses under control in the post-war period, and to which Pabloism—and ultimately the WRP—had adapted, have revealed their bankruptcy: Stalinism, social reformism, petty-bourgeois nationalism and the pseudo-left of the Corbyn, Syriza, Podemos and Die Linke variety.

“The crisis in the WRP was closely linked to this process and in many ways anticipated it.”

Schwarz noted how “The critique of the opportunist degeneration of the WRP, which David North and the Workers League had been developing since 1982, brought order to the chaos. The confusion subsided, the essential issues became clear, and the social and political camps sorted themselves out...”

“I thoroughly learnt at that time that the defence of principles must always take precedence over tactical and organisational considerations, and that all national concerns must be subordinated to the perspective of the International.

“The perspective of the ICFI, which it has since further developed and deepened, will play the same role on a large social scale in the class struggles now unfolding as the WL’s orientation did within the much smaller framework of the WRP.”

In his closing remarks, David North placed the political issues at the heart of the struggle against the WRP in their full contemporary significance. He said of the US imperialist-led the war against Iran, “The strategy of this war is to abolish the 20th century. It is to eliminate completely all traces of the great liberation struggles. The war began only a few days after Marco Rubio declared that his aim was to put an end to the great retreat that began in 1945, that is, with the defeat

of the Nazis, his heroes.”

He continued, “All the rules, all the normalities of the last historical period are over. Young people find themselves in the type of situation that existed in the 1930s and 1940s. There is no safe haven. We are living now in a historical period in which either the working class comes to power and puts an end to capitalism, or capitalism will put an end to the world...”

“It is in this context that we have to understand the implications of what took place in 1985, when we state that there would be no Marxist, socialist, Trotskyist movement if that struggle had not taken place”.

North concluded, “All the achievements of the International Committee since that time: the development of the *World Socialist Web Site*, the offensive on historical questions, the transformation of leagues into parties, the vast body of historical and political knowledge accumulated over the last 40 years, and most recently, the introduction of Socialism AI... All of this speaks to the correctness of the work that has been carried out by the ICFI...”

“But to recognise that does not provide the guarantee that this correctness and this historical continuity will be transformed into a mass movement. Outside of our efforts, it won’t take place... History doesn’t provide guarantees. What is possible must be achieved from our efforts, our determination...”

“We are in a revolutionary period. We are in a counter-revolutionary period. Which of these two tendencies in the world will predominate? As Trotsky said so well in 1932-33, against the shadow of approaching fascism, struggle will decide.”

Following the speeches, over £1,500 were raised and hundreds of pounds of literature purchased from Mehring Books.

We encourage our readers to find out more about these issues on the WSWs and through Socialism AI.



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