

David North opens fall lecture series with meetings at Wayne State and Michigan State Universities

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) this week held the first two meetings of a five-campus lecture series by David North, chairman of the international editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and of the Socialist Equality Party (US), titled “Capitalist Crisis, Imperialist War, and the World Socialist Revolution.” North spoke Tuesday at Wayne State University in Detroit and Wednesday at Michigan State University in East Lansing. Both meetings drew a strong response, with dozens of students and workers in attendance and hundreds of dollars in literature sold at each.

In the course of the lecture, North described the upsurge of mass protests and strikes among youth and workers in France, across Europe and internationally. These struggles, he explained, are erupting amid the greatest crisis of world capitalism since World War II, which is driving the ruling classes toward global war and dictatorship. North traced the roots and revolutionary implications of this crisis through the writings of Marx and Trotsky.

North welcomed the upsurge of support for socialism among millions of young people. But he explained that there is little understanding of the theoretical and historical foundations of socialism. The long period of suppression of the class struggle, particularly in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, has undermined the understanding of the essential connection between socialism as a political movement and the role of the working class as the basic revolutionary force in society. Against this, North stressed that the fight for socialism must be rooted in Marxist theory, the political independence of the working class from the capitalist parties, and the

perspective of socialist internationalism.

The discussions that followed the lecture were a central feature of both meetings. The serious and probing questions raised by students and workers reflected a growing politicization on campuses, as young people search for a perspective to fight war, dictatorship, and social inequality.

At Wayne State, one student asked what North would ask Abdul El-Sayed, the DSA-backed Democratic nominee for US Senate in Michigan. North reviewed the fundamental political differences between the SEP and El-Sayed and all those who operate in and around the Democratic Party.

North said he would ask El-Sayed for his strategy to transfer wealth from the ruling elites to the working class. “How will he realize any of his reforms on the basis of a capitalist program which he defends? How can he reconcile the profit system, private ownership of the means of production, with social needs?” El-Sayed, North continued, “supports and accepts as a basic principle that there’s a national interest to be defended. We reject that entirely. We’re for the international unity of the working class.”

A young worker active in Detroit protest movements since she was a teenager asked why every uprising, from Occupy Wall Street to the protests over the police murder of George Floyd, has proven short-lived. North replied that these were middle-class movements that never examined the foundations of society. Only a program “based on history, on a scientific understanding of the nature of society,” he said, can sustain “a lasting movement,” because “it articulates objectively the interests of broad masses of people.”

At Michigan State, a student who is a union organizer

on campus expressed interest in the IYSSE's call for the building of rank-and-file committees, asking where such committees had been built. A member of the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee in Saginaw who was in attendance responded directly: "We're not huge yet, but we're talking to other workers and members, and we're getting there." This spring, Nexteer workers rejected three tentative agreements negotiated by the corrupt United Auto Workers (UAW) bureaucracy headed by DSA-backed president Shawn Fain. The Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee, formed in the course of that struggle, opposed the fourth, which UAW Local 699 pushed through in June in a vote held inside the plant. It has since fought layoffs and attacks on workers' health insurance.

A prospective law student asked how those entering professions removed from the factory floor fit into the struggle for socialism. North pointed to the vast growth of the working class internationally and the proletarianization of broad layers of the middle class. "Lawyers are being proletarianized, and AI is going to accelerate that enormously," he said. "The challenge is which will develop more rapidly: the struggle for socialist consciousness in the working class, or the metastasizing global war and the organization of fascist movements. That's how the issue is posed: socialism or barbarism."

Asked whether the mass protests and riots in France were encouraging, North said they were "certainly an expression of enormous social anger," but stressed that youth and students cannot overthrow capitalism. The only social force that has that power is the working class. "That's why the central question in France," North said, "is whether the working class can be brought into the struggle on the basis of an independent political program." The trade unions, he noted, are doing everything to prevent this. He also urged those in attendance to "look at France as part of our own experience."

A pre-med student, concerned about the use of AI in hospitals and the isolation of workers moved online, asked how the working class can be united under such conditions. North explained that while the ruling class uses the technology to intensify exploitation, it also creates immense possibilities for the international organization of workers, including instantaneous translation across languages. "The working class, as an

international class, can now organize itself internationally and consciously," he said. But the decisive question is which class controls the technology: "AI can either revolutionize the conditions of life in the interest of humanity or destroy us."

Three lectures remain in the series, to be held at George Mason University, UC Berkeley, and the University of Michigan. We urge all our readers and supporters in the Washington D.C. area, the San Francisco Bay Area, and across Michigan to attend these meetings, to help promote them, and to bring their coworkers, classmates, and friends:

George Mason University

Wednesday, Oct. 28, 7 p.m.

Planetary Hall, Room 131

10430 Rivanna River Way, Fairfax, Virginia

UC Berkeley

Monday, Nov. 2, 5 p.m.

Genetics and Plant Biology Building, Room 100

Bayard Rustin Way, Berkeley, California

University of Michigan

Monday, Nov. 9, 7 p.m.

Michigan League, Vandenberg Room, second floor

911 N. University Ave., Ann Arbor, Michigan

We call on all students and young people who want to fight for socialism to fill out the form below, and we will contact you to discuss building a chapter of the IYSSE at your school.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact