

Book presentation in Nuremberg: *Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the 21st Century* by David North attracts great interest

Mehring Verlag
7 November 2024

As part of this year's Left Literature Fair in Nuremberg, Mehring Verlag, the German-language publishing house of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) hosted a book presentation of David North's *Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the 21st Century* last Saturday. North is the international editorial board chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* and chairman of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States. The event took place a few days before the US presidential election, where the fascist Donald Trump and the militarist and Wall Street candidate Kamala Harris were facing each other.

More than 50 visitors attended the lecture by Peter Schwarz, who spoke about the current relevance of Leon Trotsky's perspective. Schwarz is the secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International and an editor of the WSWs.

North's book is a compilation of articles written over the past 40 years explaining the fundamental questions of Marxism, of which Trotsky was the outstanding representative in the 20th century. North defends and develops the perspective of socialist internationalism, which is now once again of decisive importance. Schwarz began by placing the book in the context of current political developments:

"Anyone who looks at the world situation today without ideological blinkers cannot avoid the conclusion that capitalist society is in a hopeless crisis worldwide." War and fascism were on the rise, and capitalism was increasingly sinking into barbarism, Schwarz said.

He addressed the horrific extent of the Israeli genocide in Gaza and emphasized that the pro-war policy of the US, Germany and Israel in the Middle East was directed against Iran. At the same time, NATO's proxy war against Russia threatened to escalate into a nuclear catastrophe. The main goal of US imperialism was to prepare for a war against the emerging economic power China, he continued.

Schwarz explained that the policy of war goes hand in hand with an intensified class war against the working class, which is being burdened with the costs of rearmament. "War and class war are incompatible with democracy. That is the reason for the systematic attack on fundamental democratic rights and the growth of fascist

parties like the Alternative for Germany (AfD)." Schwarz spelt out the objective reasons for the rise of the fascists:

To fight war and fascism, one must understand their causes. These lie not in the "evil intentions" of particular individuals or political leaders but in the contradictions and laws of capitalist society.

Of course, individuals play a role in this. "Nevertheless, the leader is always a relation between people, the individual supply to meet the collective demand," as Leon Trotsky once wrote about Hitler.

Hitler, a deadbeat, did not descend upon German society from the outside as the embodiment of evil. He was chosen and made Reich Chancellor by the elites in the military, in politics, in business because they needed him and his fascist movement to crush the labor movement and to realize the imperialist plans of conquest—the struggle for "living space in the East," as the Nazis called it.

This applies in one form or another to all politicians, including Trump or the AfD. They are the product and the embodiment of certain class interests. Therefore, it is futile to try to force them to pursue a different policy through moral appeals, pressure from the streets or the like.

In this context, Schwarz quoted from the preface of the book in which David North shows the logic behind Hitler's policy of conquest. It was based on the necessity of gaining access to global resources and the world market. "The relentless growth of imperialist militarism, leading inevitably toward world war, signified the historical bankruptcy of the nation-state system," wrote North.

Therefore, it is also impossible "to separate capitalism from war—just as you can't convince the Devil to cut off his own claws. To prevent war and fascism, you have to overthrow capitalism," explained Schwarz. At the same time, the class struggle was intensifying worldwide—for example, with the Boeing strike in the

US or the cutbacks at VW in Germany. Schwarz emphasized:

The development of the class struggle, the development toward socialist revolution, is an objective process. What drives workers into struggle is not “agitators,” as the bourgeoisie always imagines, but the irreconcilability of their elementary interests in life with the capitalist system, which demands ever sharper exploitation.

But the political consciousness needed to win the socialist revolution does not develop spontaneously out of the class struggle. It requires the building of a leadership, a political party, based on a materialist understanding of social dynamics and the lessons of past class struggles. This is where Leon Trotsky’s immense significance for the struggle for socialism in the 21st century lies.

Schwarz stressed that Trotsky was the most important leader of the October Revolution alongside Lenin and that he had also theoretically anticipated it with the concept of permanent revolution in 1905. But the perspective of world socialist revolution, on which the October Revolution was based, had been replaced by the nationalist program by Stalin, who claimed that socialism could be built “in one country” independently of the world economy.

As David North explains in his book, for Trotsky the question of revolutionary internationalism was decisive. North writes:

As a tendency that emerged within the Bolshevik Party—under conditions of the defeats suffered by the working class in Central and Western Europe in the aftermath of the October Revolution—Stalinism represented a nationalist reaction against Marxian internationalism. ...

The fight against the bureaucratic dictatorship was inextricably linked to the program of socialist internationalism. The same strategic principle applies to all political tasks in the present world situation. There are no national solutions to the great problems of the contemporary epoch.

When Trotsky founded the Fourth International in 1938, he was attacked by other political tendencies, Schwarz said. They had tried to make the working class itself responsible for the defeats of the 1920s and 1930s, such as the rise of Hitler in 1933. But in fact, these defeats were not the result of the inability of the masses but of the betrayal of their parties and political leaders. That is why Trotsky stated in the founding program of the Fourth International that the key question was the historical crisis of proletarian leadership.

Schwarz concluded his remarks with an urgent appeal to build such a leadership in the working class today, drawing on the lessons of past experiences. He addressed especially the younger listeners in the hall: “You must learn and study. Don’t be satisfied

with empty phrases. Use every free minute to study and understand these historical lessons, because they are the key to a policy that can lead the workers to the goal.”

While will and determination to fight were indispensable, they are not enough; they must be guided by a correct assessment of objective reality and a scientific understanding of society, Schwarz explained. He quoted from the article “Lenin, Trotsky and the Marxism of the October Revolution” in North’s book:

There can be no revolution without will, that is, without the highest degree of subjective determination. But will and determination must be guided by a correct appreciation of objective reality, upon which the practice of the socialist movement must be based. From a theoretical standpoint, the rejection of the glorification of subjective will as a basis for political action separates Marxism from countless varieties of petty-bourgeois radical politics, including anarchism and Maoism, and, of course, the most counter-revolutionary of mass middle class movements, fascism.

The task, according to Schwarz, is to build the International Committee of the Fourth International as an international party based on the lessons of history for today, “one that is able to lead the developing revolutionary struggles of the working class and free them from the paralyzing influence of the trade union bureaucracy and various pseudo-left organizations, in order to arm them with a revolutionary socialist perspective.”

In contrast to the Stalinist and anarchist organizations and publishers represented at the literature fair, Mehring Verlag represents the tradition of the Trotskyist movement and turns to interested workers and youth with its program of Marxist books, seeking answers to the great political and historical questions of our time.

In addition to the new publication *Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the 21st Century*, other books by David North were also sold at the fair stand, including *The Logic of Zionism: From Nationalist Myth to Genocide in Gaza; A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony 1990–2016* and *The Frankfurt School, Postmodernism and the Politics of the Pseudo-Left: A Marxist Critique*.

The book *Why Are They Back? Historical Falsification, Political Conspiracy and the Return of Fascism in Germany* and other writings by the International Committee of Fourth International also attracted a great deal of interest.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact