

Four hundred attend screening of *Tsar to Lenin* in Leipzig

By our correspondents
30 March 2017

Mehring Verlag (Mehring Books), the publishing arm of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) sponsored two well-attended meetings on the Russian Revolution and its contemporary significance as part of the Leipzig Book fair.

At a meeting held at the University of Leipzig on Friday, Mehring Verlag showed the film *Tsar to Lenin*, and at the book fair itself, ICFI Secretary Peter Schwarz presented the German translation of David North's book, *A Quarter-Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony 1990-2016*.

The film screening of *Tsar to Lenin* was one of the highlights of the fair and one of its best-attended events, drawing an audience of 400 people. In the run-up to the showing, supporters of the SGP and members of the IYSSE campaigned at local factories and at the city's university. *Tsar to Lenin* is the definitive documentary of the Russian Revolution released in 1937 by Herman Axelbank and Max Eastman.

The film was introduced by Christoph Vandreier, the spokesman for the IYSSE in Germany and assistant national secretary of the SGP. Vandreier described how the film came to be made, as well as the current significance of the Russian Revolution.

Vandreier stressed that the October Revolution was the most important event of the 20th century. "For the first time in the history of mankind, the working class took an independent approach to political events, ended the world war and set about building the first-ever workers state. ... *Tsar to Lenin* is one of the most important films of the 20th century because it brings to life this historical event."

The film not only shows history being made, it is itself a part of history. "It demonstrates the enthusiasm

for the revolution on the part of workers and progressive intellectuals all over the globe," he said. Not only was its origin and the huge response to its premiere an important part of the history of the 20th century, but also the way in which it was subsequently suppressed and censored. Both the Stalinists, who organized the great terror in the Soviet Union and killed millions of communists, and the anti-communists of the McCarthy era in the US, prevented the film from being shown.

Having described the turbulent history of the film, Vandreier spoke of the falsification of history that took place after the collapse of the Soviet Union. "Professors, historians, and journalists have resurrected all of the Stalinist lies to discredit the October Revolution," he said. As examples, he cited the biography of Leon Trotsky by Robert Service, the German anti-communist Gerd Koenen, and the right-wing professor Jörg Baberowski who described the revolution as a "pogrom."

This post-Soviet falsification of history proves "the ruling elites are very aware of the power and the potential danger to their rule arising from the October Revolution."

Vandreier then dealt with the analysis made by WSWs International Editorial Board Chairman David North in his book *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished 20th Century*. The same problems to which the revolution provided an answer are once again dominating world politics. Nationalism, militarism and social inequality are spreading across the globe.

Vandreier described the process whereby the Bolsheviks were able to lead the socialist revolution to success. He quoted from the online lecture, "Why study the Russian Revolution?" given two weeks ago by North.

Lenin and Trotsky paid great attention to the clarification of theoretical and political questions, Vandreier said. “They understood that the struggle against opportunism is the necessary prerequisite for the independent intervention of the workers in the historical process.” In this regard, the perspective of world revolution and socialist internationalism was especially important.

After this introduction, the 400 people in attendance watched the film, presented for the first time with German subtitles. Afterwards, Vandreier and Schwarz discussed the film and the events it documented.

One member of the audience said he had grown up in East Germany and was unfamiliar with many of the figures named in the film. In particular, he knew little about Leon Trotsky. “So, I wonder what would have happened if Trotsky and not Stalin had triumphed.”

Schwarz explained that at the heart of the struggle between the Stalinist clique and the Left Opposition, led by Trotsky, were opposed social forces. “Stalin represented the interests of the bureaucracy, Trotsky based himself on the working class,” Schwarz said.

Stalin’s theory of socialism in one country represented a nationalist policy that increasingly opposed revolution in other countries. “Trotsky, on the other hand, represented socialist internationalism and fought for the world revolution,” Schwarz stressed.

A student from the University of Leipzig asked what relevance the film had for the study of history. Schwarz replied that the film contained valuable documentary material, which refuted many historical lies. The scenes featuring mass demonstrations made clear that the revolution was not a coup, but the result of a mass movement. *Tsar to Lenin* also demonstrates the leading role played by Leon Trotsky alongside Lenin in the revolution, he said.

At a separate meeting at the Leipzig book fair, Schwarz presented the book *A Quarter-Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony 1990-2016* by North, which will be published in German this summer.

“The book I am presenting today is of burning contemporary relevance. You have to study it to understand how Donald Trump could become president of the United States,” Schwarz said, as he opened his 25-minute report. Trump’s rise is not some aberration in an otherwise healthy society, but the product of a

long development. The fact that the US has conducted wars virtually uninterrupted during the past 26 years played an important role in the collapse of American democracy.

Schwarz then dealt with the four main sections of the book: the first Gulf War from 1990-1991, the Balkan War of 1999, the 9/11 attacks and Bush’s wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Obama’s wars of 2009-2016. When one reads the book, “It is obvious that there is an inner, logical connection between all these wars and the rise of the Trump administration, which threatens the world with nuclear war,” he said.

Summing up one of the key theses in the book, Schwarz noted that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US attempted to “reverse the protracted erosion of its global economic position through the deployment of its immense military power.” All the other imperialist powers, including Germany, are also determined to revive their own militarist ambitions.

“Not a single imperialist power can permit itself to stand aloof from the new drive for colonial plunder,” Schwarz quoted from one of the first chapters of the book, written 26 years ago. “At stake are crucial raw materials, markets and sources of cheap labor, which no imperialist state can calmly leave to its economic rivals.”

Schwarz finished his lecture, which met with great interest from the audience, with a quotation from the last chapter in the book, written in May 2016. North emphasizes that “the same contradictions that gave rise to imperialist war also radicalized the working class and drove it onto the road of socialist revolution.”

From this arises the strategy to oppose war: “War cannot be stopped without ending the economic system—capitalism—that generates military conflict. And, finally, the struggle against war must be international, uniting the working class and youth of all countries against capitalist exploitation and imperialist militarism.”

To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>