

80th anniversary of the Fourth International celebrated in Melbourne with public lecture

By our reporters
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David North, chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board and the Socialist Equality Party (US), delivered a public lecture, “Eighty Years of the Fourth International (1938–2018): The class struggle, revolution and socialism in the 21st century,” in Melbourne, Australia’s second largest city, on Thursday night.

The event was part of an international lecture series organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International by Leon Trotsky in 1938. Meetings have already been held in Sydney, as well as in Sri Lanka, and cities across the United States. Tomorrow, North will speak in Wellington, New Zealand.

About 80 people attended the Melbourne lecture, including workers and university students from Latin America, Europe, and China. Many were attending their first event held by the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, following a prominent public campaign that included street posters, community radio advertising, public speak-outs and leaflet distributions in working class areas.

The lecture covered a broad range of critically important historical and political questions—centred on the contemporary significance of the issues that confronted the international working class when the Fourth International was founded in 1938. North reviewed many of the key strategic experiences through which the working class passed in the 20th century, including Adolf Hitler’s seizure of power in Germany in 1933, following the failure of the Stalinists to heed Trotsky’s earlier warnings and develop a united front of workers’ parties and organisations to defeat the Nazis. He outlined the socialist and internationalist

perspective required to combat the renewed dangers of fascism and imperialist war.

The lecture was received with enthusiasm and a lively discussion period followed. Questions were asked about the role of Podemos in Spain and the pseudo-left more widely in Europe and on the gap between the objective tasks confronting workers and their existing level of consciousness. A collection for the Socialist Equality Party’s monthly fund raised more than \$6,000 and nearly \$400 of Marxist literature was sold, including copies of David North’s recently reissued *The Heritage We Defend: A Contribution to the History of the Fourth International*.

After the lecture, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with several of those in attendance.

Angela, a student at Victoria University, said: “The lecture was a lot of information, so I am still trying to process it all. But it was really eye opening. I was really interested in some of the writings of Trotsky that were quoted. He died in Mexico—I am originally from Colombia—and his writings have a lot of relevance today, including in Latin America. I was always trying to relate everything David North was saying about Europe and America to Mexico and Latin America.

“Everyone says, ‘history doesn’t repeat,’ but the lecture showed that the same things are happening again today. In Brazil, with Bolsonaro, and in Colombia with the government supporting the civil war, all of that is happening. And now, people are thinking, how is this all happening again. We need to find a way to stop all of these things from happening again.”

She continued: “I found the question about making the working class aware of its position in society interesting. I think, due to capitalism and consumerism, people are led to believe that we can all be part of the

top one percent. Socialism is about the community. But capitalism is teaching us to think about ourselves as individuals. I agree that it needs to be an international union of workers. You can see how stupid it is to think about only one country when you look at fascism or climate change. These are worldwide problems.”

Robin is an engineer, originally from Sweden. Explaining why he had attended the meeting, he said: “I’m new to Trotskyism, so I wanted to learn a bit more about it. I liked the videos of the French protests, the camera phones created a kind of vicarious experience where you get put almost into the situation. In Sweden, it’s a bit dire now. There are crypto-fascists in parliament. The old communist parties have just morphed into standard parties, they all wear suits, speak the same language, they’re politicians. It’s good now you have these movements that keep the flame burning.”

Jack, a public servant working in the Department of Human Services, said: “David North drew the connection between the growth of populism and the rise of fascism. It’s important not to get sucked into populism and being divided by identity. The academics don’t look at the historical connections. I think it is important to learn the lessons of history rather than repeating them. The media covers up class struggles around the world. I only become aware of them through the WSWS.”

Olli, a retired public high school teacher, said: “The lecture provided a really good materialist understanding of postmodernist thought and was particularly poignant in showing how this systemic, pessimistic approach works to convince people life isn’t what they think it is, and how it is used by the pseudo-left and the bourgeoisie generally.”

He continued: “The Labour parties, the trade unions, have adapted completely to capitalism and left a political vacuum for the bourgeoisie, and its media, for fascist forces to try and crush the working class and maintain capitalist rule.

“The growing movement of masses of people is emerging because of the huge economic inequality in all the world. There is real conflict with the system because of desperation—workers lose their jobs, their homes, their ability to fend for their families, safeguard their health and gain educational opportunities. The ruling class, not prepared to lose its own wealth and

power, has no solution. It will continue to repress these rebellions, giving rise to ever wider conflict and strikes.”

Daniel works as an integration aide at a public high school. “One thing I learnt was Trotsky’s analysis of fascism, what it was and how to fight it,” he said. “I understand it to be an extreme form of nationalism that comes to power to oppress the working class. It happens when the national state is no longer in equilibrium. That was an important part of the lecture.”

He continued: “The statistics on the rich and poor were very interesting—those in themselves are enough cause for a revolution. It was very good to see what was happening in France, the videos on the Yellow Vest protests were good. It’s hard to get this through the Australian media—the Murdoch press blocks it all out. It seems like it’ll be a long hard battle to re-educate the working class. They’re given false ideas constantly, but as they come into conflict with the system they’ll look for answers and find the Socialist Equality Party.

“The unions have obviously betrayed the workers, and new protests will probably take on a global character very quickly, in a way we’ve not seen in a long time. Internationalism is the way forward. It will look better to the working class as these resistance movements continue. David North’s quote from John Reed on Lenin was significant. Reed said, ‘Lenin was unique as a leader, he won the leadership of the working class through the virtue of his intellect’ and not demagoguery, as the ruling class must do. It really shows how powerful a Marxist analysis is.”

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