

David North's *The Logic of Zionism: From Nationalist Myth to the Gaza Genocide* addresses the disastrous consequences of nationalist political programs

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Mehring Books recently published a second, expanded edition of David North's *The Logic of Zionism: From Nationalist Myth to the Gaza Genocide*. The book now contains five lectures and speeches delivered between October 24, 2023 and March 12, 2024, in Michigan, London, Berlin and Istanbul, in the midst of the ongoing imperialist-backed Israeli genocide against the people of Gaza.

The lectures address the most urgent political questions preoccupying masses of workers and young people throughout the world: What are the causes of the genocide in Gaza, and how can it be stopped?

North, the chairman of both the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, provides a Marxist analysis of the historical development of Zionism, the nationalist ideology which justified the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 and the violent expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from their land through massacres of innocent people and the destruction of hundreds of villages.

The book demonstrates how Zionism originated in the nineteenth century, with the support of the imperialist powers, in direct opposition to the widespread support for socialism in the Jewish working class. And North explains the socialist and internationalist strategy that is necessary to mobilise the working class against the Netanyahu regime and the imperialist system, which is now leading the planet into a devastating third world war.

Israel's slaughter of tens if not hundreds of thousands of men, women and children, the destruction of entire cities, hospitals, schools, mosques, and the imposition of mass starvation on Gaza's 2.3 million residents—all this has produced profound shock and anger towards the Netanyahu regime and its imperialist backers in the US, Britain, Germany and elsewhere. It has fueled the political radicalisation of millions of workers and young people, for whom Zionism is now synonymous with some of the worst atrocities committed anywhere since the Second World War.

One aspect of this radicalisation is a surge in interest in the history of the oppression of the Palestinians. Critical historical works are being widely read, including Rashid Khalidi's *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* (2017) and Ilan Pappé's *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006). The latter went through five reprintings in 2023 in the English language edition.

These works set out, in detail, the crimes of the Israeli ruling class and the imperialist powers in Palestine, Lebanon and throughout the Middle East. The solutions they propose, however, do not go beyond appeals for reconciliation and compromise between the Israeli regime and the Palestinian people. They express the hope that growing popular sympathy will persuade governments to secure the Palestinians their basic rights.

The middle-class organisations that currently dominate the anti-genocide protests advance the same political strategy of pressuring capitalist governments to bring about a ceasefire. This strategy has manifestly failed. Despite the unprecedented scale of the protests, the imperialist powers continue to arm and give political support to the Netanyahu regime.

The Biden administration and its counterparts in Europe, Australia and Canada have amply demonstrated that they are impervious to public opinion. These governments, abetted by the corporate media, are engaged in a vile campaign to smear protesters as "antisemitic," and have unleashed police state violence against peaceful demonstrations.

In opposition to the prevailing perspective, *The Logic of Zionism* makes the case that the fight against war can only be based on an international revolutionary strategy. North explains that the genocide in Gaza and the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine "are two battlefronts in a rapidly escalating Third World War, whose scale and ferocity, unless stopped by a mass anti-war movement of the international working class, will surpass that of World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945)."

Israel, a heavily armed imperialist outpost, plays a central role in US operations against Iran, Syria and Yemen. The Biden administration's endorsement of the mass murder of the Palestinian people is a warning to workers in these countries, as well as Russia and China, of the methods that will be used against anyone who resists the imperialist drive to reconquer the world.

North rejects the boundlessly hypocritical propaganda that, in the words of President Joe Biden, Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel was an act of "pure unadulterated evil" that must be avenged. The Gaza breakout can only be understood as the product of decades of brutal oppression by Israel, just like many other violent anti-colonial uprisings throughout history, including "the Sepoy mutiny in India, the uprising of the Dakota Indians against the settlers, the rebellion of the Boxers in China, of the Hereros in Southwest Africa, and in more recent times, the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya."

Many questions remain about why the Hamas attack was not prevented by the Israeli forces. It has, however, provided the pretext for a long-planned operation to ethnically cleanse Gaza, as well as the West Bank.

While refusing to join in the hypocritical moral denunciations of the October 7 attack, North explains that the bourgeois nationalist program of Hamas is incapable of defeating the Zionist regime:

In the final analysis, the liberation of the Palestinian people can

be achieved only through a unified struggle of the working class, Arab and Jewish, against the Zionist regime as well as the treacherous Arab and Iranian capitalist regimes, and their replacement with a union of socialist republics throughout the Middle East, and, indeed, the entire world.

This is a gigantic task. But it is the only perspective that is based on a correct appraisal of the present stage of world history, the contradictions and crisis of world capitalism and the dynamic of the international class struggle. The wars in Gaza and in Ukraine are tragic demonstrations of the catastrophic role and consequences of national programs in an historical epoch whose essential and defining characteristics are the primacy of world economy, the globally integrated character of the productive forces of capitalism, and, therefore, the necessity to base the struggle of the working class on an international strategy.

This is the essence of Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Before Israel launched its genocide, North had intended to deliver a series of lectures on the history of the Trotskyist movement. Last year marked the centenary of the founding of the Left Opposition, led by Leon Trotsky to oppose the usurpation of power from the working class by the bureaucracy led by Stalin, whose regime would repudiate the program of world socialist revolution. Last year also marked 70 years since the 1953 Open Letter written by American Socialist Workers Party leader James P. Cannon, opposing the attempt by a pro-Stalinist faction in the leadership of the Fourth International led by Michel Pablo to liquidate the movement into the numerous Stalinist, bourgeois reformist and middle class nationalist parties throughout the world. The Open Letter marked the founding of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

As North explains, Israel's onslaught against Gaza required a shift in focus, but the lectures nonetheless demonstrate the profound connection between the present crisis and "critical issues of Marxist theory, political perspective and socialist program that were at the heart of the struggle waged by the Left Opposition against Stalinism."

Describing this as "the most consequential political struggle of the 20th century," North points out that had the internationalists prevailed, the entire course of history would have been radically different:

Hitler could have been stopped. Trotsky advocated a united front of the Social Democratic and Communist parties, the two mass parties of the German working class. He wrote that nothing was more critical than the defeat of Hitler, and warned that the defeat of the working class and the coming to power of Hitler would be a global catastrophe of unimaginable dimensions. And Trotsky warned as well that one of those catastrophes would be the annihilation of European Jewry.

Those warnings were ignored. Hitler came to power, with horrifying consequences. This set into motion a train of events that remain operative in the political situation we are experiencing today. Without the victory of Hitler, without the victory of fascism, there would never have been a mass Zionist movement, there would never have been a mass migration of Jews to Palestine. And one of the major factors in the escalating crisis that we are now witnessing simply would not exist.

In other words, "The creation of the Zionist state was the direct outcome of the defeats of the working class in the 1920s and 1930s because of the betrayals of Stalinism and Social Democracy."

North's analysis powerfully refutes the Big Lie that equates any opposition to Zionist ideology and the state of Israel itself with antisemitism. This is endlessly repeated by the US and European politicians and media to delegitimise mass opposition to the Gaza genocide.

On one level, North explains, such claims are simply absurd, given the prominent participation of so many Jewish people in the anti-genocide protests—including, one could add, a developing movement within Israel itself. He also points out the brazen hypocrisy of the howls of "antisemitism" given the "open alliance of the imperialist powers with the regime in Ukraine, whose principal national hero, Stepan Bandera, was a vicious fascist and antisemite, the leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which collaborated with the Nazis in the extermination of the Jews of Ukraine."

More fundamentally, North states that "the establishment of the Zionist state was not only a tragedy for the Palestinians; it was, and is, a tragedy for the Jewish people as well. Zionism never was, and is not today, a solution to the historic oppression and persecution of the Jewish people." He quotes the assessment of Leon Trotsky, who warned in 1938 that the Jews faced the threat of "physical extermination" in the coming war, and declared in July 1940, one year after World War II had begun:

The attempt to solve the Jewish question through the migration of Jews to Palestine can now be seen for what it was, a tragic mockery of the Jewish people. ... Never was it so clear as it is today that the salvation of the Jewish people is bound up inseparably with the overthrow of the capitalist system.

Modern antisemitism emerged, North points out, as "a weapon of political and ideological struggle against the emerging working class and socialist movement." Hitler's hatred of Jews was inextricably linked to his hatred of Bolshevism and the workers' movement, which included many Jews in its leadership.

At the same time, Zionism developed as a right-wing nationalist reaction against the widespread support for socialism among Jewish workers and intellectuals, who "associated social progress and the achievement of democratic rights with their assimilation, rather than segregation from society."

North pays particular attention to Moses Hess, "the first major figure to advance the perspective of a Jewish state in Palestine" in his 1862 book *Rome and Jerusalem: The Last National Question*. Theodor Herzl, who is considered the father of the Zionist movement, "later commented that if he had been familiar with Hess's book, it would not have been necessary for him to write his own *Der Judenstaat*, the *Jewish State*."

Hess had been a socialist and a friend of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, but became demoralised by the defeats suffered by the working class in the revolutionary wave that swept across Europe in 1848. In direct opposition to Marx, Hess insisted on the primacy of race over class, writing: "All history has been that of racial and class war. Racial wars are the primary, class wars the secondary factor."

He advanced the deeply pessimistic position—which is at the core of Zionism—that Jews could never be assimilated because antisemitic hatred was so deeply ingrained in the European population. On this basis, Hess opposed the socialists' fight against antisemitism and asserted that a "Jewish homeland" was needed for the survival and progress of the Jewish people. Like Herzl, Hess understood that a Jewish state in Palestine would require the support of a major imperialist power, which he argued would be France.

Although Hess is known as a founder of "Labor Zionism," i.e., an ostensibly left-wing current, he advanced the same racialist and nationalist

positions that were later propounded by Herzl and all the Zionist leaders. The fascist Ze'ev Jabotinsky paid tribute to Hess as someone who paved the way for the Balfour Declaration—the 1917 statement in which the British foreign secretary expressed the British Empire's support for “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”

There are striking echoes of Hess's positions in present-day racist politics, which the *World Socialist Web Site* has subjected to devastating criticism. In its comprehensive refutation of the *New York Times*' 1619 Project, the WSWS exposed its falsification of American history as an intractable conflict between whites and blacks, with the class struggle erased from the record. The misinterpretation of history as a never-ending race war serves to divide the working class and prevent an effective movement against the source of racial oppression: the capitalist system.

This was recognised long ago by socialist-minded Jews, whose attitude to the Zionist movement from the 1880s onwards, North explains, “was one of irreconcilable hostility.” In the Russian Empire, where the Zionists had support from the tsarist regime, “The anti-Zionism of all factions of the socialist movement prevented the Zionists from making serious inroads into the working class.”

The Jewish socialist Bund, according to historian Jossi Goldstein, launched “a war to the death against Zionism,” which it referred to as a “rotten corpse” and “a mask behind which to exploit the workers and deceive the toiling people.”

Perhaps the most politically explosive issue examined in *The Logic of Zionism* is the record of Zionist collaboration with the Nazi regime. As North explains, “There is no other period of history—prior to the founding of Israel in 1948—that so thoroughly exposed the reactionary character of Zionism and its fraudulent claim to represent the interests of the Jewish people than its conduct during the 1930s.” He cites Jewish historian Saul Friedlander, who documented the Zionists' cooperation with the Nazis to facilitate emigration to Palestine. This included inviting a writer from Goebbels' newspaper to visit Palestine and produce a series of articles promoting emigration.

On June 22, 1933, the Zionist Organisation for Germany sent an infamous memorandum to Hitler, which hailed “the rebirth of the national life of a people, which is now occurring in Germany through the emphasis on its Christian and national character.” The letter stated that the Jewish people must undergo a similar national “rebirth.”

Apologists for Zionism have repeatedly launched vicious slander campaigns against anyone raising these damning historical facts, including the philosopher Hannah Arendt, who was denounced as a “self-hating Jew” following the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 1963. Socialist writer Jim Allen's 1987 play about Nazi-Zionist collaboration, *Perdition*, directed by Ken Loach, was smeared as “antisemitic” by every major British newspaper, and Zionist pressure led to it being cancelled by the Royal Court theatre the day before it opened.

North stresses that “the sympathy expressed by the Zionist organizations for Nazism cannot be merely explained as a manifestation of cowardice and grotesque tactical opportunism. Zionism, which emerged as an offspring of imperialist colonialism and as an enemy of socialism and a scientific conception of history and society, necessarily based itself on the most reactionary elements of nationalist politics and ideology.”

The Netanyahu regime is carrying on the tradition of collaboration with far-right nationalists, including openly antisemitic politicians from the United States, Hungary's Viktor Orban, the fascist Meloni government in Italy, and former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro—to name just a few who have visited Israel in recent years.

This history exposes the utterly fraudulent equation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism. As North puts it, a process of “semantic inversion” is underway: “A phenomenon historically associated with the political right is transformed into a central attribute of the political left.”

In the smear campaigns against former UK Labour leader Jeremy

Corbyn and musician Roger Waters, a prominent supporter of freedom for Palestinians, the term “antisemite” has been completely separated “from its actual historical and political meaning.”

In Germany, police-state measures are used to suppress protests in defence of Palestinians on the grounds of “antisemitism.” Humboldt University in Berlin, where North delivered his third lecture on December 14, did not allow the International Youth and Students for Social Equality to promote it with a title that mentioned the Gaza genocide.

Responding to the demonisation of Jewish opponents of genocide as “self-hating Jews,” North points out that Jewish opposition to the political theology of Zionism goes back more than 350 years. Baruch Spinoza, one of the most important philosophers of the Enlightenment, was excommunicated by the elders of Amsterdam in 1656 for denying the authority of the Bible, and “denying the claim—which was central to Judaism as a religion and Zionism as a political ideology—that Jews are a ‘chosen people.’”

North quotes Isaac Deutscher, the biographer of Trotsky, who viewed Spinoza as one of the major Jewish intellectual forebears of Marx, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. According to Deutscher, these were “non-Jewish Jews,” in the sense that they had “gone beyond Jewry” and instead espoused “the message of universal human emancipation.”

The doctrine of the “chosen people” serves to justify the fascistic “Theology of Revenge,” “which explicitly demands the annihilation of all enemies of Israel,” denoted in Biblical terms as “Amalek.” When Netanyahu told Israelis in November to “remember what Amalek has done to you,” he was invoking this genocidal ideology.

A key exponent of the “Theology of Revenge” was Meir Kahane, founder of the fascist Jewish Defense League in the US and the Kach Party in Israel, who called for the driving out of all Palestinians. According to an essay by Adam and Gedaliah Afterman (which North cites), Kahane's theology “centred on the claim that the State of Israel was established by God as an act of revenge against the Gentiles for their persecution of the Jews,” and that its military might must be “placed at the service of redemption-bound revenge,” including through the violent annexation of the West Bank and Gaza and the complete ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

North characterises Kahane's writings as “a Hebrew-language variant of the philosophy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.” Kahane's Kach Party was banned in 1988 and Kahane was assassinated in 1990. For many years he was viewed as a right-wing extremist on the fringe of Israeli politics; yet today his followers are at the heart of the government. Netanyahu's fascist ally Itamar Ben-Gvir, the minister of national security, is a fervent disciple of Kahane. He recently led a fascist march through the Old City in East Jerusalem, with his followers wearing shirts emblazoned with the *Fist of Kahane* symbol.

The Zionism of the Israeli regime, in short, “represents the extreme counter-revolutionary antithesis and repudiation” of everything progressive, democratic and socialist in the Jewish intellectual tradition.

To reinforce this point, North takes the unusual approach of speaking publicly, for the first time, about his own family's remarkable history. He does so “because there are elements of my personal experience that may resonate with a younger generation and encourage them to intensify their struggle in defense of the Palestinians and against all forms of oppression.”

North's grandfather, Ignatz Waghalter, left his home in Warsaw at the age of 17 and travelled to Berlin, where he trained as a musician, and, despite facing numerous obstacles as a result of antisemitism, became a highly respected composer and a conductor, who “occupied a significant position in the cultural life of Berlin.” After the coming to power of Hitler, Ignatz's career came to an end and he fled the country, first to Czechoslovakia and Austria, eventually arriving in New York in 1937.

“Within days of arriving,” North says, “Ignatz initiated a project of

historic significance, the creation of the first classical music orchestra composed of African American musicians.” Driven by powerful democratic convictions, he stated, “Music, the strongest citadel of universal democracy, knows neither color, creed nor nationality.”

Ignatz summed up his credo with the words: “Wherever it may be, I wish to serve art and humanity in accordance with the words of Moses, ‘You were freed from slavery in order to serve your brothers.’”

North comments:

Clearly, my grandfather’s conception of Jewish ethics was very different from that which prevails in the Netanyahu government and the present-day Zionist state. He would be appalled and horrified if he knew what was being done in the name of the Jewish people.

Ignatz’s brother Joseph died in the Warsaw Ghetto, his brother Wladyslaw died in 1940 “after a visit to Gestapo headquarters,” and two of his three sisters perished in Poland during the war. Despite this, North states that his mother Beatrice, Ignatz’s daughter, “never expressed a trace of hatred or bitterness towards Germans.” In North’s household, “the dividing line ... between good and evil had not been between German and Jew, but between left and right.”

The final lecture in *The Logic of Zionism*, titled “The Gaza genocide and the death of Aaron Bushnell: What are the political lessons?” addresses the crisis of political leadership in the protest movement, through an analysis of the tragic suicide of the 25-year-old member of the US Air Force. On February 25, Bushnell set himself on fire outside the Israeli embassy in Washington D.C. while shouting “Free Palestine!”

North insists that “the sorrow evoked by the death of Aaron Bushnell and respect for his idealism and sincerity must not extend to justifying and praising his suicide, let alone recommending such a self-destructive act of ‘extreme protest’ as an effective form of political opposition to the Gaza genocide and, more generally, the crimes of imperialism.”

He polemicalizes against those, including pseudo-left presidential candidate Cornel West, and particularly the left-liberal journalist Chris Hedges, who are “counterposing the futile protest of the individual martyr to the building of a politically conscious movement of millions that is necessary to stop and put an end to imperialist barbarism and the capitalist system upon which it is based.”

Placing Bushnell’s suicide in its social and political context, North writes that although he was repelled by the “culture of indifference and brutality” of the military, he did not find a viable alternative in collective political action, and felt driven to respond to the Gaza genocide in a highly individual way.

Bushnell grew up after the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, when mass strikes and working class struggles virtually disappeared, suppressed by the trade union bureaucracy. Meanwhile, in the universities, left politics “was reinterpreted in a manner that focused not on the decisive question of social class but on various forms of personal identity. This had the effect, and still has the effect, of strengthening the influence of the reactionary and demoralizing outlook of individualism.”

North cites the Bolshevik theorist and member of the Left Opposition Evgeni Preobrazhensky, who pointed to “The high percentage of suicides in an epoch of counter-revolution and social disorder ... when old associations fall apart and the new have yet to emerge, when the centrifugal forces of society prevail over the centripetal” and the individual feels “powerless,” isolated and “loses his equilibrium.”

North responds sharply to Hedges’ claims that “individual self-sacrifices often become rallying points for mass opposition” and that Bushnell’s action was a “siren call to battle radical evil.” North accuses

Hedges of acting as “in effect, not only an accomplice after the fact in the young man’s death, but also an instigator of future protest suicides.” Rejecting Hedges’ false premise that such desperate actions are required to shake the masses out of their supposed indifference, North writes that the problem confronting the anti-genocide movement has not been a lack of support, but that

The protests have remained within the confines of the existing structures of bourgeois politics, directed not toward the independent political mobilisation of the working class against capitalist rule, but, rather, to the application of pressure on bourgeois governments to change their policies.

North contrasts Hedges’ position—which “speaks to the pessimism, intellectual bankruptcy and essentially reactionary character of middle class pseudo-leftism”—with that of Trotsky, who opposed individual acts of martyrdom in the fight against fascism. In a memorable article paying tribute to 17-year-old Herschel Grynszpan, a Polish-born Jew who assassinated a Nazi diplomat in Paris in November 1938, Trotsky wrote:

to all the other would-be Grynszpans, to all those capable of self-sacrifice in the struggle against despotism and bestiality: Seek another road! Not the lone avenger but only a great revolutionary mass movement can free the oppressed, a movement that will leave no remnant of the entire structure of class exploitation, national oppression, and racial persecution.

North concludes that “These words resonate in our own time and—changing what needs to be changed in accordance with the circumstances—powerfully sum up the political lessons that should be drawn from the tragic death of Aaron Bushnell.”

This brings us back to the central argument of *The Logic of Zionism*: Only the unification of the working class across all nationalities, in the fight for world socialist revolution, will put an end to war and racial or national oppression. The program of nationalism, which insisted that Jewish people could be protected by separating themselves and creating “their own” state, has led to a century of oppression of the Palestinians, repeated wars, and a fascistic regime that is carrying out genocide in Gaza.

The calls being made today for a “two-state solution” are no less bankrupt. An impoverished Palestinian state, built on a pile of rubble and a mountain of corpses, would be, to use Trotsky’s phrase, a “tragic mockery” of the Palestinian people. It would ensure their continued oppression at the hands of Israel and the imperialist powers, assisted by the Palestinian bourgeoisie.

In a thoroughly globalised world economy, the division of the world into rival states is a reactionary anachronism. It serves only the interests of the criminal ruling classes, who are setting in motion another catastrophic imperialist war to redivide the world and its wealth and resources.

The Logic of Zionism shows that there was always a progressive alternative to Zionism, and that this alternative remains. As millions of people are driven into struggles against war, dictatorship and the evisceration of living standards, North’s book will be an important weapon in the struggle to overcome the influence of middle-class radicalism and all forms of nationalist and race-based politics, in order to win workers and young people to the internationalist perspective and program of the Trotskyist movement.



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