

Toronto SEP meeting discusses Canadian, US elections

Our correspondent
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On June 27 the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held a public meeting in Toronto on the theme of “The Canadian and US elections and the tasks of the working class.” The meeting, on the eve of the Canadian federal elections, was attended by a number of workers and students from the Toronto area, Montreal, and the United States, many of whom had learned about the meeting on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The opening report was delivered by Keith Jones, national secretary of the Canadian SEP and a member of the international editorial board of the WSWs. Jones began by observing that the Canadian elections were taking place in the context both of the unprecedented upsurge of US imperialism and of an ongoing radicalization of wide layers of the population. Nevertheless, Jones noted, the Canadian elections were following their traditional, staid and parochial forms.

Jones pointed to the profound alienation of wide layers of the population from all of the parties of the political establishment, a phenomenon lamented even by the corporate-controlled media. But he counseled against indifference to the elections, stating that “elections are important political events, but the working class must analyze them from its own standpoint, from a recognition that society is divided fundamentally into two classes—and that real power lies not in parliament but with those who control society’s vast wealth.”

Jones exposed the duplicity of the Liberals’ posturing as opponents of the invasion of Iraq. Up until just before the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, the Chrétien government had been prepared to send troops to Iraq, but then diverted them to Afghanistan instead. Behind this calculation, Jones explained, was concern on the part of the Canadian bourgeoisie that the invasion of Iraq would undermine the multilateral institutions which have long been its preferred strategy in a world dominated by greater powers.

Refuting the idea that the working class is moving to the right, Jones pointed out that popular support for the Liberal

Party had in fact bled to parties popularly perceived as parties of the left, i.e., the New Democratic Party (NDP), the Bloc Québécois (BQ), and the Green Party. Support for the new united right-wing party, the Conservative Party of Canada, was significantly lower than that enjoyed by the pre-merger Progressive Conservatives and Canadian Alliance. Jones noted that the right-wing has been compelled to conceal its program from the electorate, tacitly aware of the lack of popular support for further corporate tax cuts, the destruction of Medicare, and closer ties with US imperialism.

Jones took up the NDP’s claims that, by propping up a Liberal minority government, they would be able to win certain reforms for working people. He reviewed the events of 1972-74, in which the NDP supported the Liberal minority government which created the Foreign Investment Review Agency (FIRA) and Petro-Canada. Far from being concessions to the working class, these initiatives were “instruments that reflected the desire of certain sections of Canadian capital to limit American control of the Canadian economy from the standpoint of better defending the interests of Canadian big business.” Subsequently, the Trudeau Liberals used the legitimacy given to them by the NDP to win a majority government, launching the big business counter-offensive against the working class that has continued to the present day.

Jones also discussed the fraud of so-called “Canadian values,” which provide a means of “tying workers to the state and dividing them from workers in the US, who are the most powerful battalion in the struggle against US imperialism.” Both the NDP and the BQ, said Jones, promote forms of nationalism that split the international working class. Jones concluded by calling for “a turn by workers in Canada to uniting their struggle with workers in the United States and Mexico” and then introduced David Walsh, the arts editor of the WSWs and a member of the US SEP, to give the second report.

Walsh began by pointing out that the Toronto meeting was one of a series of SEP meetings held around the world,

adding that “no other tendency on earth could hold a similar series of meetings, organized on the basis of a single, commonly held perspective: the need for the working class to tear itself away from all the old parties and organizations and adopt an internationalist and socialist program in response to the deepening and ever more threatening crisis of the imperialist world system.”

After a brief characterization of the social crisis in the United States, Walsh discussed the unprecedented level of internecine warfare taking place within the US ruling class, an intra-elite conflict fueled by the “disastrous course of the colonial-style invasion and occupation of Iraq.” In reference to the string of administration officials, intelligence agents rushing to publish denunciations of the policies of the Bush administration Walsh noted that these forces were motivated by “sharp tactical differences” and “the belief ... that Bush’s unilateralism and his reckless policies, including the incitement to torture and murder in Iraq, have worsened the position of US imperialism, alienated allies and smashed up old relationships which served American interests well for decades, losing Iraq in the process.”

Walsh noted that “the battle has so far largely been confined to the political and media establishment itself. After all, how are wide layers of the population to intervene? The 2004 election has been organized to exclude, to disenfranchise the antiwar masses. This was the meaning of the deliberate sabotaging of Howard Dean’s campaign for the Democratic Party nomination and the coming to the fore of John Kerry, a pro-imperialist, pro-war candidate. Kerry has run a consistently right-wing campaign, essentially aimed at convincing sections of the powers that be that he would be more effective at carrying out their wishes. The strategy of US global domination is a consensus policy of the ruling elite.”

Under circumstances where the Democrats and the Republicans had taken steps to ensure that opposition to the war in Iraq could not be expressed within the framework of the elections, people were compelled at this point to vote with their movie tickets, Walsh noted. In reference to Michael Moore’s film *Fahrenheit 9-11*, Walsh said, “the response to the film shatters so many myths: of Bush’s popularity, of the war’s popularity, that it’s impossible to approach the American population with a serious film, that an invincible right-wing mood dominates.”

Walsh warned against “left” attempts to prop up American capitalism (by the Green Party, for instance) and reiterated the SEP’s opposition to the “anyone but Bush” argument. Said Walsh, “The critical question is not defeating Bush, but the building up of a movement aimed at the entire rotten foundation of capitalism.” Walsh concluded with a discussion of the nature of the SEP’s intervention in the US

elections, emphasizing that “our campaign is more about policies and ideas than votes” and encouraging those in attendance to join the ranks of the SEP.

Following the reports, the discussion was opened to questions and comments from the floor. One reader of the WSWS asked about the extent to which the enormous backwardness demonstrated in the atrocities committed by US soldiers represents an obstacle to the socialist transformation of society.

Walsh explained that a broad-based movement of the working class would combat such unhealthy tendencies, and pointed to the extremely low level of morale in the military. He also briefly reviewed the experience of the Vietnam War, where, in the absence of a movement giving political expression to their anger and despair over the war, thousands of American veterans turned instead to drugs and suicide.

Following further discussion of the Moore film, a student at the meeting asked why China and the European powers had not done more to defend their various business interests in Iraq against the US invasion and occupation.

In his answer to this question, Jones stated that while France and Germany had initially opposed the war out of concern for their own imperialist interests, US imperialism had been successful in dividing the European powers, which in the final analysis are more threatened by the antiwar movement than by their American rival. Jones concluded by emphasizing the futility of opposing war by lining up behind the other imperialist powers: “You cannot fight imperialism by trying to lean on the French or German governments—or for that matter the United Nations. The only real force you can rely on is a movement that bases itself on the international working class.”

Following the meeting, participants made generous donations to the WSWS and over \$125 worth of socialist literature was sold.



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