

SEP candidate addresses University of Maine meeting on “Marxism, Militarism and War”

Our reporter
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Socialist candidate Carl Cooley, running in Maine’s 2nd Congressional district, addressed a meeting at the University of Maine campus in Orono on September 16 on the topic of “Marxism, Militarism and War.” The meeting was part of a Marxist and Socialist luncheon discussion series organized by some university faculty. The attendance of about 35 included students, faculty and others.

Cooley’s remarks to the meeting emphasized the objective roots of US militarism. He explained that the Bush administration was a dangerous symptom of a deeper disease, and not the fundamental cause of the war and threat of dictatorship.

“What I would like to show today is that the movement to the right of American foreign policy is not the result of the particular evil of its leaders, but is rather part of the trajectory of capitalism itself,” the candidate explained.

The speaker traced the development of American and world capitalism in the post-World War II period. The long economic boom and relative political stability that characterized the industrial countries of the West in the first several decades after the war was undermined from within and led to the collapse of the Bretton Woods system of fixed currencies. The developing pressure on profit rates and the decline in the average rate of profit led to a fundamental shift in social policy, especially and most sharply in the US.

“Capitalism went on the attack,” Cooley explained, referring to the period beginning in the 1970s. “Union conditions were reduced or abolished. Wages stagnated. The union bureaucracy was reduced to fighting for its own jobs and became instruments for the control of the working class, rather than leading any fight for pay and conditions. Whole industries left the United States, some destined for more modern plants in Europe, other

seeking low-wage locations in the so-called Third World.”

The rapid economic decline of American capitalism in relation to its international rivals is behind the eruption of US militarism. “The corporate elite has tried many things: outsourcing, mergers, offshoring, tax cuts, social service cuts,” said Cooley. “Nothing has been enough.... They have the most powerful military in the world ... they must play the military card.”

The candidate explained, furthermore, the connection between militarism and the attacks on civil liberties and democratic rights at home, a necessary precondition for waging the kind of worldwide campaign of plunder and aggression on which the ruling elite has embarked.

“We have been led to believe that the reason we are at war is the problem of ‘Arab extremism’; that once we get that fixed everything will be OK,” said Cooley. “Nothing could be further from the truth. The wars in the Middle East (and there may be several of them) are only the prelude to even more dangerous confrontations.”

Cooley explained how this profound crisis was manifesting itself in the campaigns of both big business parties in the 2004 elections. “Both major parties rely on militarism. We in the Socialist Equality Party said long before Kerry was a candidate that the Democrats would support the war. When Howard Dean was the frontrunner, the media and the Democratic Party leadership put on a display of ‘shock and awe’ such as we have rarely seen before. In the matter of a few days the issue of the war was off the electoral agenda.... Millions of antiwar voters were effectively disenfranchised. When one percent of the people control 40 percent of the wealth, and this one percent has control of both major parties, there cannot be true democracy.”

While sections of the ruling elite have openly encouraged and utilized fascistic elements, Cooley explained, they have not yet been able to eliminate the democratic rights of the working people. “We must use this time to build a truly independent working class party,” said Cooley. He pointed to conditions in such countries as Germany and China. “In Germany, where wages and working conditions are better than ours, recent weekly demonstrations brought tens of thousands of people into the streets to protest cuts in social services and unemployment insurance. In China, where wages and working conditions are far worse than ours, there are almost daily demonstrations against intolerable conditions under a repressive regime. We seek to unite with workers in these countries and all others, in a coordinated struggle to maintain and improve the quality of our lives.”

The international working class needs a perspective and leadership. “Two points are foremost,” said Cooley. “The working class must have a party that is completely independent of the capitalist-controlled Democrats and Republicans; and this organization must have as its goal the democratically controlled reorganization of the world economy to satisfy the needs and wants of the international working class, not the profits of the elite.”

The candidate’s presentation was followed by a lively period of questions and discussion. The topics raised included the nature of socialism and of Stalinism in the former Soviet Union; the socialist candidate’s position on the environment and health care; and the claim that the SEP candidate is playing the role of “spoiler” in the 2nd Congressional district, given the fact that Democrat Michael Michaud, running for reelection, had a winning margin of only about 4 percent in the 2002 vote.

The candidate stressed that socialism would have to be based on the democratic control and decisions of the working class itself, and that Stalinism, the nationalist degeneration of the Russian Revolution, had had a devastating impact on the consciousness of the working class. He explained that such basic needs as the defense of the environment, along with the basic human right to health care, demonstrated the incompatibility of the profit system with human needs. As for the Democrats and their candidate Michaud, Cooley said that “spoiler” is a word used by those who would cave in to the

capitalist two-party system, that it is an anti-democratic label used by those who accept capitalism and want to condemn workers to choose between one candidate of the ruling elite and another.

The response to the socialist candidate was warm and supportive, with a number of those present indicating that they would cast ballots for the Socialist Equality Party. The discussion continued until the room had to be vacated, at which point it adjourned to a nearby lunchroom, where it continued for another half hour.



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