

SEP congressional candidate addresses workers, youth in Michigan

Rick Kelly
27 October 2004

Jerome White, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for Congress from Michigan's 15th Congressional District, has campaigned against the Iraq war and for a socialist alternative to the two-party system in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, Inkster, Monroe and several other cities in Detroit's western and southern suburbs.

White and his supporters won the right to be on the ballot as an independent candidate in the November 2 election by collecting the names of thousands of registered voters on nominating petitions.

The SEP has held public meetings at Monroe Community College and the University of Michigan's main campus in Ann Arbor. White has been interviewed by the *Monroe Evening News*, the Henry Ford Community College student newspaper, the *Mirror*, and the student-run radio station at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. His supporters have widely distributed SEP election platforms to workers and college students in the district.

SEP campaigners have won significant support in working class neighborhoods, such as Inkster and Ypsilanti. These and other cities and towns in Michigan have been devastated by the ongoing destruction of decent-paying jobs, particularly in the industrial sector. Some 200,000 industrial jobs in the state have vanished since the election of Bush, and the assault on jobs has been accompanied by an attack on pensions, health care benefits and education.

In all of his appearances, White has explained that the launching of an illegal war in Iraq exposed the crisis of American democracy. There was no serious opposition to the war within the Democratic Party or the media, both of which promoted the Bush administration's lies about weapons of mass destruction and Iraq-Al Qaeda ties, legitimized the so-called "war on terror," and spread the myth that the invasion and occupation represented the "liberation" of the country and a struggle for

"democracy" in the Middle East.

Behind this ruling class consensus were economic imperatives, beginning with the drive by the US to establish unchallenged domination over the oil reserves of the Middle East. The SEP alone, he said, called for the immediate withdrawal of US troops, the prosecution for war crimes of all those who plotted and launched the war, and the payment of compensation to the people of Iraq, as well as to the families of US soldiers killed or wounded.

Of particular concern at the University of Michigan-Dearborn and Henry Ford Community College, which have substantial numbers of students of Middle Eastern descent, were the repressive measures carried out against immigrants following the September 11, 2001, attacks. In his interviews with the student newspaper and radio station, White denounced the US Patriot Act and the scapegoating of Arab workers and students. These measures, he said, were ultimately aimed at crushing political opposition to the war and establishing the framework for authoritarian rule.

At a campaign meeting held October 24 at the Ann Arbor campus of the University of Michigan, White told the audience that the November election would mark a turning point in US politics, irrespective of whether Bush or Kerry was elected. "Although tens of millions will go to the polls to defeat Bush and put an end to the war in Iraq, the reality is that Kerry is committed not only to continue the US occupation, but to intensify the bloody suppression of the Iraqi people."

The SEP candidate noted that Kerry had said he would fight the "war against terrorism" with "the same energy...I put into going after the Viet Cong and trying to win for our country." With this statement, White said, Kerry repudiated "the one honorable chapter in his life—his opposition to the Vietnam War and his acknowledgement that it was the Vietnamese, not the Americans, who were 'fighting for their country.'" The

Democratic candidate was preparing the justification for future wars against Iran, North Korea and other countries.

In addition to the thousands of Iraqis who had been killed, White said, more than 1,100 US soldiers had died in Iraq, including 30 from Michigan alone. He said it was worthwhile to look who was dying. Those from the 15th Congressional District included:

* Marine Pfc. Juan Garza, 20, of Temperance, who was killed by sniper fire April 8, 2003. Garza graduated from Summerfield High School in 2002 and was married the day after Christmas of that year.

* Army Pfc. Holly J. McGeogh, a 19-year-old from Taylor, who was among three soldiers killed when a homemade bomb exploded Jan 31, 2004, as her convoy drove along a road in Kirkuk.

* Army Spc. Donald R. McCune, 20, of Ypsilanti, who died August 5, 2004, at a military hospital in Germany of injuries he suffered when an explosive device detonated near his patrol in Balad.

“The dead from Michigan,” White said, “come from working class towns like Flint, Port Huron, Detroit, Lansing and Lincoln Park. They joined the military to get access to education or a steady job, starting at the monthly pay of \$1,179. A growing number of US soldiers are single parents and the sole providers for their children.”

White concluded by saying opposition to the worsening situation confronting the working class, including the human and financial sacrifices being demanded for the war in Iraq and future wars, would lead to a “collision between the working class and whatever administration takes office after the election.” The purpose of the SEP election campaign was to outline the political program working people required to conduct the struggle against war, poverty, unemployment and repression.

Also speaking at the meeting was David North, chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* international editorial board and national chairman of the SEP; Jim Lawrence, the SEP’s vice presidential candidate; Tom Mackaman, SEP candidate for state legislature from the 103rd District in Illinois; and WSWS journalist Patrick Martin.

Mackaman spoke of the anti-democratic attempt by the Democratic Party to exclude him from the ballot—an attempt that aroused powerful opposition not only in the US, but internationally, and was eventually defeated.

Patrick Martin highlighted the moves by the Republican Party to send thousands of their operatives into heavily Democratic working class and minority areas on election day to challenge the right of citizens to vote. This brazen

attack on voting rights was another expression of the breakdown of American democracy, Martin explained. Underlying the political crisis was the increasingly stark concentration of wealth in the hands of a financial oligarchy, and the resulting growth of social inequality.

Jim Lawrence, a retired General Motors worker from Dayton, Ohio, discussed the significance of GM’s plans to slash thousands of jobs in both Europe and the US—including 900 jobs at a GM plant in nearby Pontiac. This attack, the vice-presidential candidate said, was aimed at driving down the living standards of auto workers in Germany and the rest of Europe, just as the auto companies had for decades attacked the jobs, wages and conditions of American workers. The only way forward was for the working class to launch an internationally unified struggle against the profit system, he stressed.

David North critically assessed the claim often advanced by those in the “anybody but Bush” camp, including the *Nation* magazine, that it was necessary to elect Kerry in order to prevent the destruction of democracy. This perspective, he argued, was based on a false conception of the roots of the current crisis and an underestimation of its deep and systemic character.

In the 1930s, North explained, when fascism threatened liberal democracies around the world, many left-wing liberals, together with the Stalinist parties that were allied to the bureaucratic regime in Moscow, argued that democracy could be defended only on the basis of a “popular front”—that is, a broad, cross-class alliance of all those who opposed fascism. The theory of popular frontism had disastrous consequences in many countries, such as Spain and France, because the working class was blocked from advancing its own independent perspective.

Similarly, in 2004, North said, the American working class could not defend its democratic rights through any kind of bloc with the Democratic Party. Workers had to fight both bourgeois parties. Only through the development of its own independent perspective, based on the struggle for socialism, could the working class secure its democratic rights.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact