

Supporters of SEP campaign meet in Michigan

Our reporter
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Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party's election campaign in Michigan attended a public meeting at Macomb County Community College in Warren on May 18. The meeting, addressed by Jerome White, the SEP candidate for US Congress in Michigan's 12th Congressional District, discussed the purpose of the party's campaign in the 2006 elections within the context of the Bush administration's growing attack on democratic rights and corporate assault on workers' jobs and living standards.

Petitioners have collected more than 1,000 signatures to place White's name on the Michigan ballot, out of the 3,000 signatures of valid voters needed by July 20. The meeting made an appeal to working people and students throughout the area to join the campaign and provide a political alternative to the Democrats and Republicans, who are committed to continuing the criminal war in Iraq and defending the wealthy at the expense of working people.

White noted that the US government was waging two wars, preparing a third against Iran, and carrying out the most sweeping violations of both international and US Constitutional law, all in the name of defending "national security." Whatever tactical differences the Democrats had with Bush, White said, they promoted the same lie that these reactionary measures were needed to protect American citizens.

Far from demanding the ending of Bush's illegal eavesdropping operation, he said, leading Democrats had been briefed about the program dozens of times since it began after September 2001 and kept the program secret from the American people. White then pointed to the friendly treatment leading Democrats have given to Bush's nominee to head the CIA, General Michael Hayden, who ran the spying program as the former head of the National Security Administration.

Nowhere have the Democrats suggested, White said,

that government surveillance of its citizens is motivated, not by the desire to protect the American population from terrorists but to protect the government against its own citizens. He noted the growth of widespread opposition to the war and Bush's plunging poll numbers to point out that the government was increasingly isolated, and that there had been a long history, including during the mass antiwar and civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s, in which such methods had been used to intimidate opponents and crush political dissent.

White also pointed to the role of the Democrats in legitimizing the racist and xenophobic campaign over so-called illegal immigration being pushed by the White House and congressional Republicans. Democratic Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois had recently declared, "We must act now to secure our borders," adding, "Democrats are willing to support any reasonable plan that will secure our borders, including the deployment of National Guard troops."

Like the war on terror, the reactionary measures taken against immigrant workers—from national ID cards, to militarizing the US-Mexico border, to empowering state and local police to round up immigrants—is all being done in the name of defending the American people, White said.

It was necessary to cut through the sham of "national security" and reveal whose interests these policies really serve. "The claim, that we are all one 'nation' to be protected by the government is aimed at concealing the social reality that America is divided into sharply antagonistic classes whose interests are diametrically opposed."

The war in Iraq, like the war on workers' jobs and living standards in the US, was being waged to defend the interests of the super-rich. White noted that this summer will mark the 25th anniversary of Reagan's firing of 13,000 air traffic controllers in 1981, the prelude to a

quarter century of class warfare by corporate America that drove down the living standards of the working class and transferred billions of dollars in wealth to the country's richest elite.

For decades leading up to the late 1970s and early 1980s, the phenomenon of permanent mass layoffs was a rarity, White said. As a recent book, *The Disposable American*, noted, the Bureau of Labor Statistics did not count "worker displacement" until 1984. Since then, the bureau has counted 30 million workers who have been permanently separated from jobs and paychecks, not counting the millions more who were forced into early retirement or suffered some other form of disguised layoff. Corporate downsizing has had a devastating impact on working class communities, White said, pointing to a recent study by the University of Michigan that showed job insecurity can claim as great a toll on mental and physical health as a life-threatening illness.

In Macomb County, part of Michigan's 12th Congressional District, more than 27,000 factory jobs—or 22 percent of all manufacturing jobs—have been wiped out since 2000. Over the last four years, the number of people receiving public assistance in the county rose 76 percent, while food assistance jumped 99 percent.

White pointed to the enormous social inequality in America and the huge transfer of wealth from working people into the bank accounts to America's super-rich: Since 1979 the wealthiest one-hundredth of 1 percent of all Americans—some 30,000 people who make \$6 million and more each year—saw their incomes rise by 500 percent. In the last year alone, the average top executive's pay rose 27 percent, to \$11.3 million—330 times the yearly earnings of an average manufacturing worker. Weekly earnings of workers rose by only 2.9 percent in 2005, less than the rate of inflation.

Typical were the actions of auto parts giant Delphi Corp. While demanding its 33,000 US workers accept a 50 percent wage cut and mass layoffs, the company has put aside \$60 million for performance bonuses to managers this summer, in addition to \$38 million in executive bonuses being handed out in July.

Referring to the immigration debate again, White displayed a pie chart that showed that the richest 5 percent of the American population controlled 68 percent of all income in 2001. "The claim that immigrant workers are the cause of our economic problems is a monstrous lie. The fact is 95 percent of society is being forced to fight over a thinner piece of the economic pie, while the super-rich monopolize the wealth."

This social inequality, he said, was also behind the efforts of both big business parties to exclude third-party candidates and in particular socialists who fight to mobilize the working class as an independent political force against the profit system. Afraid that our party will give expression to the mass opposition to the war and corporate dictatorship, both Democrats and Republicans were using unfair election laws to political disenfranchise the working class.

White concluded with a call for workers and youth to join the SEP election campaign.

During the question-and-answer period, a college student asked about the socialist program to defend democratic rights and the struggle against the Stalinist degeneration of the USSR. A nurse also asked how the SEP intended to overcome the confusion in the working class about socialism.

White responded that in the 1930s it was "capitalism" that was considered a dirty word, not socialism, and that anyone who was looking to win the support of the most militant sections of the working class had to be known as an opponent of the profit system. This changed during the postwar boom, he said, when American capitalism was the dominant world power and anticommunist union officials, such as United Auto Workers President Walter Reuther, could point to improving living standards and job security for American workers as "proof" that there was no need to fight for socialism.

The end of the economic boom and the return to conditions of inequality and economic insecurity not seen in decades was producing a turn to the left among working people and the opportunity to explain and fight for a socialist alternative. The growth of the readership of the *World Socialist Web Site*, White explained, was one sign of this growing hunger for a socialist perspective.

To find out more about Jerome White's campaign, and to support the petition drive to place his name on the Michigan ballot, contact the Socialist Equality Party.



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