

Vote “No” on Michigan Ballot Proposition 2!

Unite working people across ethnic, racial lines to defend jobs and education!

**Of Jerome White, Socialist Equality Party candidate for US Congress in Michigan’s 12th District
19 October 2006**

The following statement was issued by Jerome White, the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for US Congress in Michigan’s 12th District, on Proposition 2, the so-called Michigan Civil Rights Initiative, which will appear on the state ballot November 7. The measure calls for amending the Michigan constitution “to ban affirmative action programs that give preferential treatment to groups or individuals based on their race, gender, color, ethnicity or national origin for public employment, education or contracting purposes.”

As the congressional candidate of the Socialist Equality Party in the 12th District, I call on Michigan citizens to vote “No” on Proposition 2, the deliberately misnamed “Michigan Civil Rights Initiative” (MCRI). This initiative, which has been funded by ultra-right forces, such as billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife, is aimed at further restricting access of minorities, immigrants and women to decent-paying jobs and higher education.

Along with Scaife—who played a leading role in the impeachment drive against Bill Clinton—the other major contributor to the MCRI is the extreme right-wing Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, which enjoys close ties to the Bush administration and is one of the largest financial backers of private school vouchers, faith-based social services and the destruction of welfare rights.

The initiative was placed on the ballot through fraud and deception. Six weeks ago US District Court Judge Arthur Tarnow found that the “MCRI engaged in systematic voter fraud by telling voters that they were signing a petition supporting affirmative action,” when in fact the measure is aimed at eliminating affirmative action programs. The judge, however, would not remove the initiative from the ballot, making the absurd argument that MCRI petitioners had not violated the Voting Rights Act because they defrauded black and white voters equally!

Those who authored this initiative are attempting to

exploit real concerns over the lack of educational and economic opportunities and divide the working class along racial and ethnic lines by arguing that the “special privileges” of minorities and women, not big business and the government, are responsible for the precarious economic situation facing the majority of working people. This same divide-and-rule strategy is seen in the efforts to scapegoat immigrants and blame Mexican workers for the lack of jobs and social programs in the US.

The Socialist Equality Party stands for full equality and is against all forms of discrimination based on race, ethnic background, religion, sexual preference or gender. The right to high-quality and affordable college education, a decent paying job and economic security must be guaranteed to all, regardless of skin color, country of origin or gender. This can be achieved only by establishing the closest possible unity of workers and youth in a common struggle against the two parties of the American corporate-financial elite and the profit system they defend.

Decades of ever greater concentrations of wealth in American society and attacks on wages, living standards, working conditions and social services for the overwhelming majority—under Democratic and Republican administrations alike, at the national, state and local levels—have demonstrated the futility of workers appealing to the political establishment and seeking to pressure it to make serious political reforms. On the contrary, what is required is the development of an independent political movement that unites all working people, on the basis of genuinely democratic and socialist policies, against the two-party system and the financial oligarchy that it defends. That is why at the very center of the program of the Socialist Equality Party is the rejection of all forms of nationalism and the fight for the unity of the working class in the US and internationally.

In a country where the richest 1 percent of the population controls 40 percent of the wealth and corporate CEOs make 430 times an average worker's pay, the notion that there is not enough money to meet the needs of all working people is an insult to intelligence. Workers today are creating more wealth than ever before, but it is being monopolized by those at the top and squandered on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which are being fought on behalf of the rich.

As a socialist I fight for genuine equality. This is only possible by carrying through a radical reorganization of economic life and redistribution of wealth in order to meet the needs of working people, not corporate profit. I call for a sharp increase in taxes on the richest segments of society, in order to greatly improve public education by building new schools and hiring thousands of new teachers. Free, high-quality college education must be guaranteed to all, as well as good-paying and secure employment.

While opposing Proposition 2, which has nothing to do with a genuine defense of equality, at the same time I do not support affirmative action programs. Underlying all racial politics and racial preferences is the assumption that there is no possibility of changing society to meet the basic needs of everyone and that working people must continue to compete over a shrinking number of jobs and educational opportunities. Racial preferences are in fact discriminatory and inevitably generate animosity by pitting white and minority workers and youth against each other.

Far from resolving the problems of the mass of minority workers and youth, affirmative action has chiefly been used to cultivate a thin layer of wealthy blacks, personified by such reactionaries as Clarence Thomas, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell and MCRI backer Ward Connerly, who defend social inequality just as ruthlessly as their white counterparts in America's ruling establishment.

Affirmative action was first systematically promoted by the Republican administration of Richard Nixon following the urban rioting of the 1960s that were fueled by poverty, discrimination and police brutality. Nixon and other ruling class politicians saw affirmative action as a means of promoting "black capitalism" and cultivating a layer of minority businessmen, judges and politicians who would have a stake in the profit system and the suppression of the struggles of the working class.

While the conditions of minority workers and youth have in large measure deteriorated over the last three

decades, a new black elite has emerged as a result of the affirmative action programs used by large corporations, colleges and the US military.

Minority workers and youth have nothing in common with the well-heeled Democratic Party politicians and black entrepreneurs who gathered in Detroit on October 17 for a \$1,000-a-plate dinner to raise money to oppose Proposition 2. These politicians defend an economic and political order—the capitalist profit system—that has enriched a few, including themselves, while depriving working people, both black and white, of a decent future.

With no genuine solutions to offer working people, the Democratic Party, just like the Republicans, resort to racial politics to defend the profit system and block a unified struggle of the working class, which threatens the wealth and privileges of America's moneyed elite.

Working people must find a new road of struggle—the unity of all workers and youth in the US and internationally against the profit system to guarantee that the needs of working people, not corporate profit, are met.

The fight for this program requires a political break with the Democratic and Republican parties and the building of a mass socialist party of the working class. That is why I am running as the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US Congress in Michigan's 12th District and why I am urging you to vote for me in the November elections.



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