

SEP candidate in Michigan addresses public forums

Larry Porter
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Jerome White, Socialist Equality Party candidate for Congress in the 12th district of Michigan, addressed several groups during the past week, emphasizing the SEP's opposition to the war in Iraq and the one-sided war big business has launched against the living standards of the workers in his district.

White's area includes southeastern Oakland and southern Macomb counties in Detroit's northern suburbs. It is an area dominated by the auto industry where workers have been hit very hard by mass layoffs, including the recent announcements by Ford, GM and parts maker Delphi of up to 100,000 job cuts in North America. In Macomb County, the number of people living in poverty jumped from 44,000 in 2000 to 71,000 in 2005.

During the past week White spoke at a public event virtually every day. His Democratic Party opponent—12-term incumbent Congressman Sander Levin—is not campaigning because the district is considered a "safe" Democratic seat. Levin's campaign office, which lists no public appearances for the congressman, did not even bother to send a letter of acknowledgement to the community organizations that invited him to public events.

On Monday evening, October 16, White spoke at a "Meet the candidates" event sponsored by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Veteran of Foreign Wars (VFW) 4659. On Tuesday, October 17, White spoke at a forum on affirmative action (See "Vote 'No' on Michigan Ballot Proposition 2!"), and on Wednesday, October 18, White spoke at a "Meet the Candidates Luncheon" sponsored by the Madison Heights Community Roundtable. On Friday, October 19, the SEP held a successful public meeting in Ferndale.

The veterans' event was held in Shelby Township, a city in northern Macomb County, located about 20 miles from the Selfridge Air National Guard Base. White made clear his opposition to militarism and drew the connection between war and the attacks on the democratic rights and living standards of working people and demanded an immediate end to the American occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and the return of all US troops.

After explaining that the war had cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi people, White said, "American soldiers and their families are also the victims of this criminal war. They were lied to and their sense of loyalty was exploited. Now the number of American troops who have been killed is fast approaching 3,000, with more than 10 times that number wounded. In Michigan, 100 soldiers have been killed, some as young as 19, from towns like Hazel Park, Warren and Detroit, where the lack of decent paying

jobs and the high cost of college education compels many to join the military."

Referring to a poll that showed that 72 percent of US troops in Iraq wanted to return within a year, White said, "Who speaks for these soldiers and the majority of the American people who want an end to this disastrous war?" The Democrats and Republicans wanted the war to continue he said, because they speak for the corporate interests behind it. The same big business parties, he said, were waging a war against working people at home. "We are meeting today in Macomb County, where the rate of home foreclosures has shot up 230 percent since last year and the number of people living in poverty has doubled in the same period. Both parties are only interested in protecting the security of the wealthy elite."

White was given a warm round of applause from the audience of nearly 100 people. There was widespread anger against the war and the Bush administration. One Vietnam veteran said that the American people had never been told the truth about why they were being sent to war, and added that the Bush White House was well aware of an impending terrorist attack before September 11, 2001 and did nothing to stop it. The wife of a veteran thanked White for saying "what had to be said."

There were 27 candidates or representatives of candidates at the event. Besides White, participants included the Democrats and Republicans, Greens, Libertarians, and various independents running for federal state and local positions. Several Democratic Party candidates reacted to White's speech by claiming that they were not rich or supporters of the war in an effort to distance themselves from the official position of their party.

An "antiwar" Democratic candidate, Robert Denison, who is running for Congress in the 10th district, said, "We can't cut and run. We need to gradually move our troops to other countries in the region, so they can intervene in Iraq and stop the bloodshed we are seeing now." In his election material Denison embraces the so-called war on terror, saying the Iraq war had made the US more vulnerable to attacks from Iran, North Korea and even Pakistan.

In her comments on the Iraq war, Green candidate for US House of Representatives in District 10, Candace Ruth Caveny, promoted illusions in the Democrats and suggested the war could soon be ended because the Bush administration's war policies were coming under criticism from former generals Wesley Clark and Colin Powell and were being reviewed by the newly formed Iraq Study Group. (See "The Iraq Study Group: a bipartisan conspiracy

against the American and Iraqi people”) Caveny said she hoped that “hearings before the US Congress” would lead to the troops coming home.

At the Madison Heights event, White said the US invasion had turned Iraq “into a mass graveyard.” Moreover, he asked, “How could it be a war for democracy, when the US president was trampling on the US Constitution at home, spying on the American people, detaining people indefinitely and taking away their right to due process, and sanctioning the use of torture? The Democrats had supported the Bush administration, White said, including his Democratic opponent US Congressman Sander Levin who had voted for the Patriot Act, to sustain funding for the war and in opposition to setting any deadline for the withdrawal of US troops.

White concluded by challenging Levin, saying, “Let’s debate the war and show where each of us stands.”

While Levin did not make an appearance at the Madison Heights event, his son, Andy Levin, who is running for Michigan State Senate, was present. In his remarks, the younger Levin did not mention the war and offered the Democrats’ usual ineffective proposals—tax cuts and other incentives for big business, job retraining for laid off workers, etc.—as a palliative for the social crisis in Michigan, which has the highest unemployment rate in the nation. Defending his silence on the war, one of the younger Levin’s aides said, “There’s no war in Michigan”—although more than 100 Michigan soldiers are among the nearly 3,000 killed in Iraq thus far.

Andy Levin personifies the decay of the Democratic Party and its hostility to the working class. Although the older Levin, a US congressman for 24 years, has long jettisoned social reformist policies, he is still identified—though mistakenly—with the party’s former liberal policies, having begun his political career in Detroit in 1964 and long enjoying close relations with the United Auto Workers union.

Andy Levin, who is clearly being groomed to take over the family dynasty from his father or perhaps his uncle, long-term US Senator Carl Levin, lives in Bloomfield Hills, a wealthy suburb and is running in a Republican-controlled district. A Harvard Law School graduate, the younger Levin worked as a public relations man on the staff of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy in Washington and in the Clinton administration as an expert on labor-management cooperation. He has all the vices of the privileged, anticommunist and chauvinist labor officialdom, denouncing “foreign” imports for hurting the US auto industry and focusing much of his campaign on keeping “Canadian trash” out of Michigan landfills.

When accused by his Republican opponent of supporting the funding of welfare and Social Security benefits for unregistered immigrants, Levin shot back, “State and federal government must ensure enforcement of existing laws and prevent welfare, Social Security and other tax-payer-funded benefit programs from going to illegal immigrants.” In addition, he added, “Our government must stop illegal immigrants from entering the US ... bring more agents and improved technology to the security challenges presented at our borders.”

During the Madison Heights event, the SEP candidate replied to a question about immigration from the audience. “It is the principle of the Socialist Equality Party,” he said, “that every

person must have the right to live and work in any country that he or she chooses. Anti-immigrant chauvinism, just like racism, is used to divert social anger away from big business and the government—which is responsible for the lack of decent paying jobs and educational opportunities, and instead to blame immigrants and minorities.” He noted that the candidate’s forum that day was being held at the “Club Venetian,” named after a great Italian city, and that everyone in America except the Native Americans were immigrants. White concluded that workers had “to reject anti-immigrant chauvinism, which has always been used to divide and weaken the working class, and unite their struggles.” (See below a schedule of TV broadcasts of the Madison Heights Community Roundtable.)

On Tuesday, White addressed a forum on Michigan’s ballot Proposal 2, the anti-affirmative action measure, and distributed his statement, “Vote ‘No’ on Michigan Ballot Proposition 2! Unite working people across ethnic, racial lines to defend jobs and education!” The event was organized by the League of Women Voters at the Southfield Public Library.

At the forum White opposed the campaign of the misnamed Michigan Civil Rights Initiative, a group funded by right-wing billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife, and at the same time opposed affirmative action as another divisive measure to pit workers against each other. While the proponents of affirmative action support the profit system and accept that workers and youth had to compete over a dwindling number of job and education opportunities, White said, the SEP fought for the unity of all working people, across racial and ethnic lines, based on a socialist program to fight for decent-paying jobs and high-quality free education for all.

Comcast cable channel 18 will air the Madison Heights Community Roundtable in Madison Heights, Hazel Park, Oak Park, Southfield, Lathrup Village, West Bloomfield, Orchard Lake, Keego Harbor, Sylvan Lake and Hamtramck.

Tuesday, October 24, 8:30 p.m.

Wednesday, October 25, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 31, 8:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 1, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, November 3, 7:30 p.m.



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