

SEP brings campaign to American Axle workers in Detroit

Our reporting team
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Socialist Equality Party candidate Jerry White spoke to workers at the American Axle & Manufacturing plant in Detroit Tuesday explaining his opposition to the Wall Street bailout being orchestrated by the Bush administration with the full support of the Democratic Party. The SEP candidate received a warm reception from workers who expressed indignation over the transfer of public assets to the financial elite, which will do nothing to address the social crisis facing workers and their families.

Earlier this year, more than 2,000 workers were involved in a bitter three-month strike at the former General Motors auto parts factory, which also shut down facilities in western Michigan and Buffalo, New York. The strike was provoked by demands for a 50 percent wage cut by CEO Richard Dauch, who has pocketed \$250 million since taking over the company from GM in 1994.

The United Auto Workers union (UAW) betrayed the strike, and more than half of the 3,650 workers, including 1,100 in Detroit, lost their jobs. Those remaining have seen their wages cut from \$28.00 an hour to \$18.50, and in some locations as low as \$10.00.

Several workers greeted White enthusiastically, with some expressing their gratitude for the stand the SEP took against the UAW betrayal of the strike. During the 87-day walkout, scores of workers expressed their views through the *World Socialist Web Site*, and the SEP consistently explained the need for the development of a political movement of the working class to fight for a socialist alternative to the capitalist system.

Several workers told the candidate conditions had seriously worsened since the end of the strike last May. With layoffs rolling through each department, no one's job is secure, they said. Workers pointed to flatbed

trucks rolling out of the plant loaded with hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of machinery. These machines, they told the candidate, were heading to the company's factories in Mexico, Brazil, and China and low-wage facilities in the US.

"There has been a non-stop war against the people," one worker, Angela, declared. They are taking the machinery out bit by bit, and none of us are going to be left with jobs. Now, there's talk over another wage cut if we don't take the buyout."

White explained that the assault on American Axle workers was a prelude to more generalized assault on the working class that was now taking place as the corporate and political establishment sought to make workers pay for the collapse of American capitalism. Both Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama and his Republican opponent John McCain agreed that workers had to pay for the bailout of Wall Street, he said.

As White told workers the SEP was opposing the rescue package, several workers responded, "So do I."

"I feel this is a crime," a woman worker said of the \$700 billion bailout. "If they gave us a portion of that money we could stimulate the economy."

"It's a bailout for the rich folks," another worker said. "I'm glad they turned it down although they are re-doing it." He nodded his head in agreement when the candidate said the billions pocketed by the Wall Street bankers and speculators should be confiscated and put into a fund to help those losing their homes--with the worker adding, "and for healthcare, too."

Another said, "They got themselves into this. Let them get themselves out of it. Why trust them with more money?" Another older worker added, "It's a legal mafia, that's all. They messed up the economy, and they expect us to pay for it. The Democrats and Republicans

are both the same."

Still another worker said, "That money should be divided among all the people to help save our homes and jobs. If you divided \$700 billion between the 200 million adults in the US, that would be \$3,500 for each of us."

A number of workers were taken aback by Barack Obama's strident support for the bailout plan. White explained that this showed that the Democrats, like the Republicans, were beholden to the richest sections of the population, not working people.

"The working class is disenfranchised," White said, explaining that the SEP election campaign was aimed at developing the fight to build a mass political party of the working class, based on the unity of the international working class and a socialist program.

Expressing her anger about the Democrats and Republicans joining together to push the bailout, Angela asked what the candidate was proposing "they should do" instead.

"It's not a matter of what they should do," White responded, "It's a matter of what *we*--the working class--should do. The financial crisis demonstrates the failure of capitalism and all the claims that the 'free market' and the 'risk-taking' speculators and corporate CEOs should decide all economic matters. What have they produced? Their single-minded pursuit of personal enrichment has brought the entire economy to the brink of collapse.

"There does have to be public intervention and economic planning--but this must not be done by big-business politicians, on behalf of billionaire investors and corporate executives. Economic decision-making must be controlled democratically by working people and the whole economic system reorganized to meet human needs, not profits. That is socialism, and that is what we are fighting for."



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