

# SEP candidates speak to workers in Toronto and Montreal

**Our correspondent**  
**3 November 2008**

Jerry White, the presidential candidate of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, and Keith Jones, the national secretary of the SEP (Canada), spoke to an audience of workers, students, and artists at a well-attended meeting in Toronto last Thursday.

On the previous evening, Bill Van Auken, the SEP's vice-presidential candidate, had addressed a similar gathering in Montreal. At both meetings, the SEP candidates presented a Marxist analysis of the world financial crisis and explained the need for working people to base their opposition to the capitalists' drive to make them pay for the crisis on an international socialist program.

Keith Jones opened the proceedings in Toronto with a discussion of the effects of the economic crisis in Canada and the response of the minority Conservative government.

"The Conservatives," said Jones, "spent much of the just-concluded election campaign claiming that the Canadian economy is strong and that the financial meltdown on Wall Street will have only a limited impact on Canada. With the financial crisis spreading to Europe, the plunge of the US—Canada's largest trading partner—into recession, and the plummet in oil and other commodity prices, the claims of a Canadian 'exception' have become utterly untenable.

"Canada's manufacturing sector, which is massively dependent on the US market, has been shedding jobs for the past five years. Its two principal engines, the auto and forestry industries, are in deep crisis, with the US house-construction market mired in slump and the Detroit-based Big Three automakers threatened with bankruptcy.

"And in recent months, the commodity price boom in the mining and oil sectors has been punctured by fears of a world recession and growing production cuts. With oil prices halved since the early summer, major oil companies, including Suncor and Petro Canada, have signaled that they will be slowing, even delaying, major oil sands projects, so as to slash billions in expenditure next year."

Jones briefly discussed how the unions, the social-democratic NDP, and various "lefts" had sought to tie the working class to the Liberal Party, the Canadian bourgeoisie's traditional party of government, and to the Bloc Québécois during the recent election. He also warned against various pseudo-Marxist

groups that oppose the struggle for the political independence of the working class, seeking instead to orient workers to pressuring the unions and social democrats and promoting illusions in Keynesianism as an alternative to "neo-liberal capitalism."

In his keynote speech, Jerry White noted that all the commentators, experts and advisers of the ruling elite in business and politics claim that the financial crisis "could not have been foreseen and came as a complete surprise." The development of the crisis, however, had not caught the Marxist movement by surprise.

White dealt with the extent of the present crisis, observing that the US and European governments had in recent days made about \$5.4 trillion in public funds available to bail out the banks and other financial institutions—i.e., to safeguard the fortunes of the very people responsible for the crisis.

White stressed that recent events have clearly revealed the true character of the capitalist system and of bourgeois democracy. "A small financial elite decides the fate of society," said White, adding that "the same people, who for years have preached that the coffers are empty, with no money being available to pay for better wages, education, health care, culture and other social benefits, are now making billions of dollars and euros available if the financial aristocracy requires it."

He emphasized that the Wall Street bailout would not put an end to the financial crisis because its origins lie in the decline of the economic supremacy enjoyed by the US after the Second World War and the basic contradictions of capitalism—a system in which production is driven not by social need, but by the pursuit of personal profit. In past decades, many industrial jobs in the US were destroyed and the growth of private wealth became increasingly removed from the actual process of the creation of value by the working class.

White then dealt in greater detail with the historic crisis of US imperialism, explaining that Washington's growing militarism was an attempt to compensate for the loss of economic strength and was aimed at keeping America's European and Asian rivals in check. The election of a President Obama would not change this fundamental course. Since the primaries, Obama has made it clear that under his presidency the US military would not be drawn down, but merely be taking another direction, with

troops withdrawn from Iraq to be redeployed to Afghanistan.

The history of the Great Depression of the 1930s shows that the international working class can only respond to the dangers of fascism and war by acting independently politically and by developing a socialist alternative. In the US, this requires a conscious break from the Democratic Party.

"The large banks must be subject to the democratic control of the working class, which creates the enormous wealth of today's society," said White. Only the working class can rationally allocate social resources to develop the economic and social infrastructure, financing a vast program of public works so that nobody remains without employment, and expanding healthcare and education.

The great problem today is that no mass party today fights for a workers' government committed to implementing a socialist program. The Socialist Equality Party in the US and its sister parties around the world are, said White, dedicated to building such a party.

Following the speeches, White and Jones engaged in a lively discussion with audience members on a variety of topics. One student asked whether the crisis of American global economic dominance would engender a shift in hegemony to a China-Japan bloc. White responded that no imperialist power has ever surrendered its position peacefully and referenced the two world wars of the last century. Other questions ranged from the nature of the Chavez, Lula and Moreno regimes in South America to whether the bitter legacy of social-democratic and Stalinist betrayals could be overcome.

## **Fundamental contradictions of capitalism**

Van Auken began his remarks to the Montreal meeting by explaining why he was in Canada six days before the election. He explained that the SEP campaign was not principally aimed at winning votes, but rather at articulating the independent interests of the international working class. "The American election," said Van Auken, "is an international event. What America does has an enormous impact all over the world."

Van Auken explained that the "tumultuous events on the world financial markets over the past few weeks...will have far more to do with setting the policy of the next administration than any will expressed by the voters at the polls in November."

He located the source of the current financial meltdown in the very structure of world capitalism. "At the heart of this crisis are two fundamental contradictions besetting the global capitalist system. The first is the conflict between the social character of the production of wealth and its private appropriation by the capitalist owners of finance and industry. The second is the conflict between the global integration of production and the division of the world into rival and

competing capitalist nation states."

Van Auken detailed the devastating impact of the financial and banking crisis on ordinary working people as it makes its way into the so-called real economy. He gave as an example the "virtual bloodbath" being prepared in the auto industry, with Chrysler having "already announced plans to cut 5,000 white collar jobs in preparation for a merger with General Motors, a deal that would result in the layoff of many tens of thousands more."

Turning to the social implications of the present crisis, Van Auken said, "It is quite likely that within a year's time we will confront a vastly transformed economic and social landscape, with the official jobless rate in the US reaching between 10 and 15 percent, millions more in poverty and immense social struggles erupting throughout America and around the world." Van Auken went on to explain that under conditions of the "the worst economic crisis of American capitalism since the Great Depression of the 1930s," the US election had assumed a "surreal character" because "there are no fundamental differences between the two candidates"—the Republican John McCain and the Democrat Barack Obama.

"Both had voted for the \$850 billion bailout of Wall Street and both had given their blessing to the pouring of \$250 billion of that public money into the private coffers of the country's major banks." And "the two major parties pursue the consensus policy of the US ruling elite of using military force to assert hegemony over the most oil-rich regions of the planet."

The speaker shed light on the objective basis of the present crisis, which "is not some kind of aberration, a glitch in an otherwise healthy system, but "only the latest in a series of speculative bubbles," whose source "is bound up with the historic decline of American capitalism," a process that Van Auken then traced in detail.

"Who will pay for the crisis?" asked Van Auken in bringing his remarks to a close. "The Socialist Equality Party rejects the entire framework within which the Bush administration and the Democratic Party propose to deal with the financial disaster. Whatever their disagreements...they all agree that the working class, the overwhelming majority of the people, must bear the burden of the crisis. Our party says not. We insist that this crisis demands fundamental change in both the political and economic system of the United States."

A lengthy discussion followed, with questions ranging from the significance and implications of an Obama victory, to the global food crisis, and the role of centrist elements such as France's self-proclaimed "anti-capitalist" champion Olivier Besancenot in providing capitalism with a last line of defense.



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