

SEP holds conference in Detroit

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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held a public conference Saturday at Wayne State University in Detroit to review the first six months of the Obama administration and discuss a new political perspective for the working class.

In his opening report, SEP National Secretary Joe Kishore noted that millions of people voted for Obama to express their opposition to the policies of the Bush administration. However, on every issue—including war, bank bailouts, the attack on auto workers, education and health care—the administration has pursued a right-wing policy that is in continuity with its predecessor.

Much of Kishore's report was devoted to examining Obama's economic and social policy. Citing a recent report by the Special Investigator General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program, Kishore pointed out that Obama pledged as much as \$23.7 trillion to the banks. In a startling graphic, Kishore illustrated the enormity of that sum by contrasting it to median US household income (approximately \$50,000), the total budget deficit for the city of Detroit (about \$300 million), annual defense spending in the US (\$500 billion), and the total GDP of the US (\$13.8 trillion). Average household income and the Detroit deficit are so small in comparison to the other categories that they were not visible on the graph.

Kishore noted that the major banks are posting record profits, and the top executives and investors are anticipating record bonuses and pay this year.

While Obama has demanded concessions from auto workers and has backed major cuts in social programs in California and other states, the administration has repeatedly rejected caps on executive compensation. The burden of the economic crisis, Kishore noted, is being placed squarely on the backs of the working class.

Kishore concluded his speech by saying, "The

present situation is incredible. You have a social crisis that is affecting millions of people. Social programs are being cut in the states; unemployment is soaring; wages slashed and people are being thrown out of their homes. However, those who are responsible for the crisis are not only *not* being hurt by it, but in fact they are doing better than ever.

"The financial and corporate elite is using the crisis to carry out programs that they have desired for years, and they are now doing this through the Obama administration. This is not a reformist government; it is a right-wing government all down the line."

Kishore insisted that opposition in the working class will grow, and that the perspective of the SEP is to the building of an independent socialist movement of the working class. He concluded by calling for those in attendance to join the Socialist Equality Party.

After Kishore's report came an open discussion in which conference attendees were encouraged to ask questions.

WSWS US Editor Barry Grey noted in response to one question about whether it was necessary to use the word "socialism": "It is important to look at the way this discussion has developed. When the facts are presented, it is hard to argue that Obama is anything other than a defender of the banks.

"It is necessary to directly pose the question: Is it possible to fight for the right of all workers to have a job and a decent standard of living while simultaneously supporting the Democratic Party? We say no. Can a worker have a decent job and a right to live under the existing capitalist economic system? We say no. We are for socialism."

The meeting took place a little more than a week before the Detroit mayoral election, which will be held on August 4. D'Artagnan Collier, the SEP mayoral candidate, answered questions and participated in the discussion.

One attendee asked Collier about his plan for the city. “I oppose all home foreclosures, I oppose all utility shutoffs, I oppose factory shutdowns, layoffs and the destruction of the Detroit Public Schools system,” responded Collier. “The working class should control the wealth they create. We are for the nationalization of the major banks and corporations under workers’ control. We encourage demonstrations, plant occupations and strikes in preparation for a broader struggle of the working class throughout Detroit, the US and internationally

Responding to a question about the relationship between the SEP and other tendencies, Jerry White, a WSWS writer and former presidential candidate for the SEP, noted, “Political parties represent distinct social and class interests. The various middle class tendencies have promoted Obama and supported the trade unions. They do not represent the interests of the working class.”

“The building of the SEP,” White said, “will emerge with the growth of opposition in the working class.”

Those in attendance responded enthusiastically to the conference.

“I thought the meeting was good,” said Wardell, a retired employee for the Housing and Urban Development Department. “It was informative and helped me to understand some of the confusion of the many groups on the left. I find it difficult to understand the differences among the left groups. I know there are differences, I don’t want to clump them all together, but I have to study it more. I am still learning.”

“I enjoyed the meeting and the discussion,” said Calvin, a young worker. “I work in credit counseling, and in that business you see more and more people losing their homes, becoming discouraged. People right now are still latching on to Obama and the Democrats. It’s understandable, but I think people are starting to look for more credible answers.”

“People need relief,” Calvin continued, “and there is no relief coming from the Democrats or the Republicans. It is up to us workers to organize and build an independent party. I am thinking of joining the SEP.”

Two attendees came across the SEP when they became curious about socialism and searched the Internet for information.

Tim heard about the meeting through the SEP Web

site socialequality.com, which he came across through searching for local socialist groups. “I was interested in socialism,” said Merrick, “and wanted something local. I came across the Socialist Equality Party’s Web site while I was searching for something.”

Eric, another attendee, told a similar story: “They were calling Barack Obama a socialist, and I knew that wasn’t right, so I searched the word ‘socialism,’ and one of the first things that popped up was the WSWS. I have been following the Web site since around October, and I saw the meeting advertised there.

“I thought the meeting was pretty good,” said Eric. When asked if he agreed with the perspective put forth in the meeting, he responded that he agreed with the SEP “more than he agreed with anyone else.”



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