

# Emergency Conference attendees speak to the World Socialist Web Site

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The Emergency Conference on War and the Social Crisis, held in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on April 17 and 18, brought delegates from every region of the US, along with international representatives from Germany, Australia and a large contingent from Canada. The conference elaborated an international program to guide the coming struggles against war, unemployment, and social misery, which was unanimously ratified by attendees in votes on a series of resolutions.

The conference attracted a large number of youth and workers who were either having their first experience with political struggle or had until recently considered themselves Democrats and supporters of President Barack Obama. A number of workers attended from Detroit and other devastated industrial centers, some learning of the conference as a result of the Socialist Equality Party's (SEP) leadership in the struggle against utility shutoffs in Michigan.

There were also a number of public school teachers in attendance. Teachers have been victimized and scapegoated by the Obama administration for the failings of the cash-starved public school system. Several attendees were longtime readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* making their first trip to attend a public meeting.

Charles, an engineer from Texas, said he had been reading the WSWS for many years, routinely forwarding its articles. "Two things made me decide to come," he said. "The whole thing going on in Detroit has upset me, especially the utility shutoffs and house fires." A series of fires in homes without utility service have killed a number of people in Detroit in recent months, including small children and disabled and elderly residents. Charles also said he was angered by plans outlined by Detroit Mayor Dave Bing and his corporate backers to shut down large sections of a city. "It's a sad spectacle," he said. "Detroit used to be an industrial center. Now they are shutting it down because it doesn't produce enough profit."

The other reason he came, Charles said, was his opposition to war. "The Obama administration has two wars going on in Asia," he said, "and they are aiming for two or three more. There's no money left over for anything else."

Debbie and Terry are from Monroe, in southeastern Michigan, which is suffering from the devastation caused by the Obama administration's forced bankruptcy of the auto industry. Debbie is studying to become a nurse, and Terry works in the construction industry. "The whole social situation is bad," Debbie said. "Monroe is being turned into another Detroit. People are going out of town to find work. A lot of middle class people are leaving."

"They talk about jobs coming to Monroe. But the auto plants they closed down employed thousands," Terry said. "Anything that opens up employs just a handful of people."

Debbie and Terry expressed opposition to the Obama administration. "It's really just the continuation of so many years of Bush," Terry said. "There's no difference between the Democrats and Republicans."

"Obama's health care plan is a big rip-off," Debbie added. "How are people going to afford the private insurance plans? They're already struggling to pay rent and put food on the table."

Sam, a student at Cornell in New York state, recently became a member of the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE), the youth movement of the SEP. He said that in 2008 he campaigned for Obama, believing he was not "just another representative of the powerful." But when Obama carried on all the policies of the Bush administration, Sam thought things over. This is when he found the ISSE. "It's helped explain things," Sam concluded.

Chirine came to the meeting after attending the Citizens

Inquiry into the Dexter Avenue Fire report-back meeting. Energy giant DTE is pursuing Chirine's mother for a \$2300 utility bill. "She's 64 years old, and she can't afford that kind of money," Chirine said. "She gets by on a Social Security survivor's check each month, and DTE wants \$350 or \$400 for its 'payment plan.' So many homes in Detroit have to resort to energy theft just to survive the winter."

"When I see the big businesses and the bankers making the kind of money they're making, it enrages me," Chirine continued. "It enrages me that they can just smash the little people, and they're still getting their bonuses."

"President Obama gets in and says, 'We're not going to let these bankers get away with this,'" Chirine continued, imitating Obama's manner of speaking, "But then he does everything he can to see to it they get all the money they want."

Tory is a college student from San Diego, California, where she is a member of the ISSE. She said that the economic crisis has impacted her personally. "My school, San Diego State University, increased tuition twice in one year," she said. "My dad has been without a job for two years. When he was laid off, the company told him that he earned too much money. With Obama, all we've seen is change for the benefit of the extremely wealthy, not for working people."

Emilio is a 16-year-old student from Chicago, Illinois, who said he has suffered "profoundly" as a result of the social crisis. "My father got in a car accident and couldn't get paid for months," he said. "My parents couldn't even pay for my school lunches anymore."

Emilio, who travelled by bus to attend the conference, said he has come to the conclusion that the Democratic Party was a right-wing party after Obama carried on the Bush administration's war policies.

"This conference is a valuable experience," he said. "It's very relevant to every situation workers are confronting, whether it's in the coal mines in West Virginia or the neighborhoods in Detroit."

Isaac, 18, and Kevin, 19, are members of the ISSE from Kingston, New York, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, respectively. Isaac's hometown of Kingston is already depressed, he said, and he fears the consequences of layoffs of

government workers. "The county is the number one employer," he said. "Any cuts will cause serious problems in the area."

Kevin said that before he found the ISSE, he had been a supporter of "protest politics." "My dad is a union carpenter, and it used to be that we wouldn't drive a foreign car," he said. "All that's changed now, and we started to see the flaws in the union. Last year every one viewed Obama as an answer. Now all of that is discredited."

Kevin said the University of Pittsburgh increased tuition 6 percent last year. "My roommate had to quit school because he couldn't afford it," he said.

Jake, an ISSE member who attends school in Kingston, Ontario, said "It's really important to get involved to build the Socialist Equality Party." He said he was moved by the personal stories of struggle from conference attendees and "seeing how these problems affected people in their everyday lives." The conference, he said, had shown him how important it is to base a political movement on an understanding of objective developments and history.

Eric from Columbus, Ohio, is an independent filmmaker who wants to make a documentary about the deadly house fires on Dexter Avenue and Bangor Street in Detroit. He attended the hearing of the Citizen's Inquiry. Eric said he feels he "has similar views to the SEP." The social crisis is "not just caused by bad apples or being evil, it's an objective process," he said.

He said the speakers were "all informative and very clear on where they stand. They want to break with the Democrats and Republicans." Asked if he felt such a break was necessary, he said "Absolutely." "Unfortunately," he added, "activists on the left tend to gravitate towards the Democrats in the end; it leads to supporting Obama."



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