The Fight for Socialism Today

Conference delegates speak with the WSWS

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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with a number of delegates attending the conference "The Fight for Socialism Today" in Ann Arbor on April 9 and 10. The conference was organized by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) and the WSWS.

Evan, Sean and Mark are three students at Monroe Community College in Michigan who have been studying Marxism since attending an SEP meeting on the attack on WikiLeaks.

All three said that the economic crisis is hurting them or people they know and that it is difficult for young workers to find jobs. "People feel grateful if they can get a job at $14 an hour," Sean said. "So many people who live around us are in foreclosure. My dad is laid off."

Evan said, "Obama can boast all he wants about the economy adding jobs, but the only jobs that are coming are minimum-wage, dead-end jobs. The good-paying jobs are all gone. Where I live I'm surrounded by foreclosed properties, too."

"My mother was diagnosed with cancer and after initially seeing her, Karmanos Hospital in Detroit refused to take her insurance after first charging her," Evan said. "She's found treatment elsewhere, but the hospital's refusal to see her right away jeopardized her health. I don't have any health insurance myself and if I get in a car accident or something like that, I'm finished.

"My brother, who also lives in Wayne County, was laid off from a job in the auto industry. Both he and his wife are unemployed, and they've lost their home now."

Cynthia is an unemployed worker from Detroit who is a member of CAUS (Committee Against Utility Shutoffs), a movement of Detroit workers for free and equal access to heat, light and water founded by the SEP.

"The corporations are killing people in Detroit for their profits," she said. "I know someone who just got a $3,000 bill from DTE Energy. I know someone else who got shut off for a $100 bill.

"I'm very upset about it and I want to fight, and CAUS and the SEP are the only ones fighting. I think that socialism is about bringing people of all races together to fight for their rights. Utilities should be social right and not shut off."

Isabel is a public school teacher from Buffalo, New York who has been redbaited by her union, the New York State Union of Teachers (NYSUT), for circulating articles from the WSWS. She said she came to the conference because of the Obama administration's attack on public education in the form of the Race to the Top initiative.

"In Buffalo schools we've got massive poverty, which makes for very difficult working conditions for teachers," she said. "Now they're basically giving the schools the choice of firing half the teachers and starting new semi-private charter schools.

"I came across the WSWS and agreed with what it said about the attack on public education, so I shared an article through e-mail. Then a few weeks later in a meeting of teachers, this union rep yelled out, 'Isabel, I didn't know you were a communist.'

"I voted for Obama. The teachers unions promised us that he would reverse No Child Left Behind. Then we got Race to the Top, which is even worse. Now you have Randi Weingarten [the head of the American Federation of Teachers] celebrating the end of tenure."

Nile is a graduate student from the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee who participated in the demonstrations against Governor Scott Walker's

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recently passed anti-worker bill.

"I came to the conference because I believe it is necessary for workers to fight back, otherwise the attacks on their living standards will continue and become even more drastic," Nile said. "What's being laid bare is the ugly face of capitalism."

He continued, "People are going to rise up and they need a new leadership so they won't be misled again, just as they have been misled in Wisconsin into supporting the Democratic Party, a party that backs all the reactionary policies in Walker's law."

Steven was raised in Detroit and is now a student at Oakland University, where he studies computer science. He started reading the WSWS a few months ago.

"I agree that there needs to be a break with the Democrats," he said. "They are presented as the 'lesser of two evils,' but like the Republicans they are for capitalism. Barack Obama is the same as Bush and has actually expanded US imperialism. Obama is just the successor of Bush. During his campaign he was always saying, McCain will continue the policies of Bush. In fact, he himself has continued the same imperialist policies."

Steven said he found the international perspective at the conference powerful. "Trotsky always spoke of the preparation of revolution in many other countries after the Russian Revolution," he said. "Capitalism had an incredible reaction to the revolution in Russia. American history books never teach you of how Winston Churchill and leaders of the other imperialist nations led the assault on Russia after the working class took power."

Matthew is a student from Canada also studying at Oakland University, where he majors in music. Both Steven and Matthew have been involved in supporting the work of CAUS.

"I came to the conference because of a genuine concern about the conditions in Detroit and many other cities," Matthew said. "Most major cities in the US and Canada are going the way of Detroit. Unless you are a member of the upper-middle class, the budget cuts will affect you.

"I came to the conference to find out more about the party and the program of the party and to meet other like-minded people. Now is the time if there ever was one to build a party. This is a fight to ensure the future of all of humanity. All the conditions are pointing towards World War III. It's the same thing all over again.

"The conference is very clarifying. An international perspective is absolutely necessary for a valid socialist organization. Marx thought the revolution would first happen in Germany, now the US is the new Germany. America is the keystone of capitalism."

Zach, a web developer at a university library, spoke out sharply against the war in Libya.

"The Obama administration and the political establishment offer only empty rhetoric about freedom and democracy," he said. "Humanitarian intervention is an excuse for imperialism and a move to grab more power. The war is about US imperialist interests, the oil companies and the military industrial complex. They have a lot to lose and would be willing to crush any real revolutionary forces to keep what they have."

Zach discovered the WSWS two months ago and learned of the conference from the web site. "I'm a government employee. There are double-digit cuts to post-secondary institutions," he said. "I'm a member of a union but don't have much faith in their ability to defend me.

"I was very excited to find out that the conference was right where I live. I was also excited to hear today that one of the primary problems that is faced by the working class is the crisis of revolutionary leadership. It's not the fault of the working class that they have not been able to develop political consciousness. I find the polemical style of the presentation very persuasive, and believe socialism needs to be fought for."

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