

Conditions in this city are a damning indictment of capitalism

SEP presidential candidate Jerry White speaks in Detroit

Shannon Jones
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In the first public meeting of the Socialist Equality Party election campaign, presidential candidate Jerry White spoke February 16 in Detroit, Michigan. The event was co-sponsored by the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs (CAUS) and the International Students for Social Equality.

“Detroit provides a somber warning of what capitalism plans for every section of the working class throughout the US and the world,” White said in his remarks. “The mass unemployment and poverty in this city, the closing of schools and cutting off of utilities, are a damning indictment of capitalism.”

The meeting was attended by a cross section of the Detroit area working class and youth, including teachers, college students from Wayne State University and Wayne County Community College, unemployed workers, a former auto worker, and other Detroit area residents.

Lawrence Porter, assistant national secretary of the SEP and chairman of CAUS opened the meeting. The Democratic administration of Detroit Mayor David Bing, he said, had outlined massive budget cuts to respond to a \$150 million deficit. The cuts included a 10 percent pay reduction for city workers, 1,000 layoffs, health care cuts and cuts to retiree benefits. The Detroit City Council has called for even greater cuts, proposing 2,300 layoffs including the elimination of

200 firefighters.

Earlier in the week, the Bing administration had come to an agreement with the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, the largest city worker union, for \$100 million in concessions. The mayor had also announced that 1,000 city workers would lose their jobs beginning Monday, including 78 bus drivers and 60 mechanics.

The attack on the working class required a new political party and program, independent of and in opposition to the unions and the two big business parties, Porter said.

“Ours is not a conventional campaign,” White explained in his remarks. “My running mate Phyllis Scherrer and I are standing in the elections to provide a socialist program to unite the working class in the US and internationally.

“In his State of the Union address, President Obama promised to make Detroit the model for America. What does this mean? In short, the impoverishment of the working class to boost the profits of corporate America.”

White explained the history and role of the United Auto Workers, which has collaborated with the corporations in decimating the Detroit area through the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs. The UAW backed the Obama administration even as it cut the wages of auto workers, carried out attacks on teachers and joined with the Republicans in slashing funding for education, health care and other vital services.

White noted that the same week that Bing announced his cuts General Motors reported a record profit of \$7.6 billion. “It is a lie to claim that there are no resources. It is a question of how society is organized and in whose interests. We fight for the mobilization of the working class as an international social force.”

“The Socialist Equality Party,” said White, “is running in these elections to give a political voice to the working class, which is thoroughly excluded from and ignored by the political system. To win its rights, the working class must fight to replace capitalism with socialism, that is, genuine equality and democratic control of the economy by the working people.”

In conclusion, White called on all those in attendance to support his campaign and set up election committees in their neighborhoods and workplaces.

There were many questions and a lively discussion after the initial remarks. One student from Wayne State asked what the SEP planned to do to build momentum for its presidential campaign and its program for restructuring society.

White replied, “We are planning to carry out the most aggressive campaign possible. We know that the media is controlled by big business. We know that the ballot access laws are undemocratic. But we also know the working class is quite aware that the whole political system is stacked against them and workers are looking for a political voice.

“We have our website, we have social media. We will go to the factories, to the colleges and high schools. But our campaign relies entirely on people like you. We are confident that if workers and young people like yourselves become involved in this campaign, its message will be magnified a hundred times over.”

In response to a question on racial politics, White noted, “For a long time the politics of the Democratic Party, fully supported by left types said the issue isn’t class, it is race. It was claimed that if we have black policemen, black judges, a black president, it would solve your problems. That has worn pretty thin. Class is the basic division in society, not race.”

A young mother from Detroit described the conditions she faced. “I grew up in Detroit. Now my neighborhood looks like it has been bombed. There are a lot of abandoned houses. Our neighborhood is ignored by the news unless there is a murder.

“We have no resources in Detroit. They are taking

everything away from us. They are closing schools. But, if we don’t have jobs and cars how can we relocate to somewhere else. How can we change this?”

In reply Porter said, “What you are raising is the crisis that is hitting workers in Detroit and nationally and internationally. The reaction of the Bing administration is to cut services. They are shutting down whole neighborhoods in Detroit. This is a policy that is being played out around the entire country.

“As long as we live under the dictatorship of the banks and big business and their defenders, the needed resources will not be provided. The only way workers can win back the gains that are being taken away from them is through a political struggle against the capitalist system.”

At the conclusion of the meeting a fund appeal for the election campaign raised more than \$400. In addition, several workers and young people signed up to help form election committees in their schools and workplaces.

Sierra, a student at Wayne County Community College, remarked, “The meeting touched on the things I had issues with. I am concerned about the school closings and the bus drivers being laid off. Everyone knows that the money is in the wrong hands. It is not going where it is needed—to the schools, to the neighborhoods. The response time for the emergency services, fire and police is a big issue. That’s how people die.

“I was glad to get more information about the program and get education,” she added. “I am very interested in becoming involved.”



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