

SEP supporters discuss election campaign with students in Ann Arbor, Michigan

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As part of the Socialist Equality Party's 2012 election campaign for presidential candidate Jerry White, a WSWWS reporting team visited the campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor on Monday. The team worked in conjunction with the University's chapter of the International Students for Social Equality to distribute leaflets for the election meeting today, at which White will speak.

The views of students and other residents of Ann Arbor expressed both the disillusionment of a significant section of young people, three years into the Obama administration, and the continued political confusion among some students.

Obama selected the University of Michigan to deliver a major speech following his State of the Union speech in January. He sought to package a reactionary proposal on higher education as a major initiative to limit increases in college tuition (See, "Obama outlines plan to put education on rations").

There is still a base of support in Ann Arbor for Obama, particularly among more privileged sections of academia. At the same time, the majority of student face soaring tuition and debt, combined with very limited job prospects under conditions of continued economic crisis.

In the course of the SEP's campaign for the meeting over the past week, many students expressed agreement that there was very little difference between the Democrats and the Republicans. Three years of war, attacks on democratic rights, and growing social distress for millions of people have had their impact. There was general interest in the SEP's program.

When it came to an understanding of what socialism means, however, many did not have a clear conception. At schools like the University of Michigan in particular, identity politics has played a harmful role,

and education in genuine left politics is very limited. Students greeted the explanation of the socialist program in response to the economic crisis and war with great interest.

Dominique, a women's studies major, was asked how she felt about Obama and declared, "I'm definitely anti-Obama. First of all because of the [National Defense Authorization Act]. I mean, that set martial law into place, anywhere in the world. There's basically no due process. Doesn't that go against our Bill of Rights?"

The NDAA, signed by Obama late last year, gives explicit authorization to the president to have the military arrest anyone, including US citizens, and hold them indefinitely without charge. SEP supporters reviewed the record of Obama in attacking democratic rights and expanding US militarism.

When asked if she saw any political party that represented her interests, Dominique replied, "I'm not registered and I don't plan on voting. I just don't trust the government at all." She said that she was learning about socialism in her coursework, specifically related to the civil rights movement and to various black-nationalist figures of the 1960s. She said that she thought that for those movements, socialism was the ideal.

Dominique also agreed that there were no differences between the Democrats and the Republicans, saying, "Obama is the same as Bush." When our reporting team mentioned the social conditions and unemployment rates in the city of Detroit, Dominique was quick to reference Obama's State of the Union and other recent speeches where he has declared a rise in the employment rate. "Didn't he try and say that employment was improving? But isn't it like at the worst levels it's ever been? You can tell that was a lie."

Other students were more ambivalent. Caitlin, a

freshman and chemistry major, said she knew little of politics though she said that she had learned about socialism in high school. “Actually, I really don’t like politics that much. You know, when we read the *Communist Manifesto*, we would think it sounded great, but our teachers told us not to take it too seriously, that it could never work in practice.”

In terms of her choice for the 2012 election, Caitlin said that she will probably vote for Obama because she hasn’t “seen any other candidates worth voting for.” She also felt that people are being too harsh on the president and should give him a few more years. Caitlin expressed concern for both war and job creation, saying, “I was too young to remember when the wars [in Iraq and Afghanistan] started; it just seems like they have always been around.... I think Obama is trying to bring jobs back, but it also doesn’t look like much is happening, so I think people have a legitimate reason to complain and be angry.”

In response, SEP reporters discussed the record of the Obama administration, including the bailout of the banks, the attack on the working class and social programs, and the expansion of war.

Another student, who asked not be named, said that she tended to vote conservatively on economic issues but more toward the middle when it came to social issues like gay rights, “I don’t agree with Obama from an economic standpoint, but I’m socially moderate.” When pressed on which of Obama’s economic policies she specifically disagreed with, the student was unable to clarify saying that she thought that in the end the bailout of the banks “probably wasn’t worth it.”

In the course of campaigning for the meeting, supporters distributed hundreds of leaflets and engaged in discussions with dozens of students and workers. The meeting will be held at 7:00 pm, in the Kuenzel Room of the Michigan Union. For more details, click [here](#).



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