

Jerry White campaigns in Detroit against school closings

Our reporter
14 February 2012

On his first day of public campaigning, Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White spoke with students and parents at Kettering High School in Detroit, one of more than a dozen schools an emergency financial manager has ordered closed this fall.

White and his supporters urged youth from Kettering and their parents to attend a public meeting called by the Socialist Equality Party and the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs Thursday in Detroit, to oppose the budget cuts being imposed by the Michigan state government and the administration of Democratic Mayor David Bing.

Over the last three years, emergency managers—appointed first by Michigan’s Democratic governor Jennifer Granholm and now by her Republican successor, Rick Snyder—have carried out a scorched-earth policy: shutting scores of schools, privatizing transportation, maintenance and other jobs, slashing teachers’ salaries and expanding for-profit charter schools.

This has been fully supported by President Obama, whose education secretary, Arne Duncan, has called Detroit “Ground Zero” for the administration’s reactionary agenda of so-called school reform.

Kettering, built in 1964, is located on the city’s east side, an area devastated by the closure of auto factories by Chrysler and lined with abandoned homes and storefronts. The school closing is being coordinated with Mayor Bing’s plan to shut down city services to entire neighborhoods deemed too poor and underpopulated to maintain. Of course, the shutdown of local schools has the effect of condemning to death an entire neighborhood.

Shortly after White and his supporters began distributing election material, they were surrounded by

dozens of young people who spoke out against the school closing and wanted to hear what the SEP candidate had to say.

“Why should they close this school? It’s already hard enough for kids to get to school,” said Devin Hill, 19, who graduated from Kettering in 2011. “It is especially bad with the financial situation. A lot of people are too poor to own a car and drive their kids to another school. This community needs this school. It helps keep the kids off the street.”

Tamara Powers, a 15-year-old freshman, said, “Closing this school is stupid. What do they want to do, close all the Detroit public schools and make us go out to the suburbs to learn? What kind of future are we going to have? Working at fast food jobs?”

Dontae Mills, 17, said, “They say they’re closing it because of bad test scores. But they are not offering us tutoring or any extra help. We have textbooks with the pages torn out. Schools help young people—but now they are taking them away from us.”

Cynthia Wright, a home health care worker, stopped and talked to the SEP candidate after picking up her daughter at school. “I graduated from here in 1984 and my brothers and sisters did too. We used to walk to school. They built up the school since then and that was good. But now they want to close it—I’m all for fighting this.

“If they make them take public transportation to get to school, with all the bus cuts who knows when the bus is going to come? A lot of people don’t have a car because they can’t afford repairs or insurance.

“Kids do go to school. They want an education, especially the way the economy is. But they keep closing schools. They closed Chandler Elementary, even after they put more money into it. Does that make any sense?

“Some of the poorest kids can be the brightest. My daughter takes after-school programs and studies hard because we know education is the most important thing. But they are taking so much away. I used to take her to the library twice a week but they’ve closed it.”

In March 2009, hundreds of students at Kettering walked out to protest the removal of a well-loved principal who was scapegoated for low test scores and pushed out to clear the way for further cutbacks and ultimately what is taking place now.

The shuttering of the school will not only affect hundreds of students and school staff in the main school. It is a particularly cruel blow for students in Kettering’s West Wing, a center that provides special education and services to the most severely impaired students, including those with closed head injuries, autism and other cognitive disorders.

After speaking to students and parents, Jerry White issued the following statement:

“The closing of another 16 public schools in Detroit, after years of school closings and budget cuts, is a social crime. While the corporate and political elite never stop talking about the importance of education everything they are doing is depriving working-class youth of that basic right.

“The emergency financial manager, Roy Roberts, is a former General Motors executive who has been brought in as a hatchet man to close schools, attack teachers and hand over public assets to for-profit schools. He has the full backing of President Obama, who like his Republican predecessor has fully embraced the lie that teachers, students, parents and the public education system itself are responsible for declining student achievement.

“One only has to talk to young people and their parents in Detroit, however, to see the terrible obstacles poverty and decades of budget cuts, overcrowded classrooms and ill-equipped schools are to students and teachers alike.

“President Obama has repeatedly declared that ‘Detroit is back’ and pledged to make the city the model for the rest of America. Every worker should take that as a dire threat. The only thing that is back in Detroit are the profits of the auto companies—extracted through slashing thousands of jobs, and cutting the wages and benefits of auto workers. While GM, Ford and Chrysler make billions, for the people of Detroit,

the poorest big city in America, there has been no recovery.

“The Socialist Equality Party rejects the lie that there is no money to vastly improve public education. We call for trillions of dollars to hire new teachers and pay them well, to build new schools and repair older ones, and make available to all youth, regardless of their parents’ income, the most up-to-date learning tools and broadest access to human knowledge and culture.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact