

Jerry White campaigns in Queens, New York

A WSWS reporting team
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Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for US President, kicked off his New York election campaign Friday in the Queens borough of New York City, where he grew up.

The day of campaigning followed a lecture given by White at the New School for Social Research in Manhattan.

White spent Friday morning campaigning in Jamaica, Queens, near York College, the school he attended while working at United Parcel Service. In the afternoon, he visited Rochdale Village, the neighborhood where he used to live.

“Up to 1975, tuition at the city university system was free,” White told York College students. “The working class fought for the right to college education for their sons and daughters. It was once known as the Harvard of the working class.”

When White attended York College in the late 1970s, tuition at the City University of New York (CUNY) was only a few hundred dollars. One of his first political experiences was participating in mass protests over the city’s attempt to raise tuition.

But Chanda Basdeo, a 19-year-old student at York College, told White that tuition at York College has since ballooned to \$2,700 per semester. “The tuition keeps rising, and there are no jobs,” she said. In addition to going to school, she takes care of her grandmother, whose health care assistance was recently cut by the visiting nurses’ association. “I’ve had to adjust my college schedule to take care of her. That

makes it even harder to find a job,” she said.

Jamaica is a major transit interchange, marking a point where thousands of commuters transfer from subways to buses. White spoke to bus and subway workers at the Jamaica transit centers, who have been working without a contract since January 15 this year.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) put forward demands for a concessions contract in January, including cuts to health benefits and working conditions. Since then, workers have been kept in the dark about the status of negotiations by Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100. From the start of negotiations the TWU bureaucracy made one thing clear, however: that a strike was off the table.

One subway conductor told White, “the MTA authorities always claim they have no money when we are negotiating our contract. Then after it is signed they find the money. It’s like the government. They say there is no money for education and other social programs but they found trillions to bail out Wall Street.”

William Jones, a transit worker with 26 years’ experience, told White, “The MTA is always hiring more supervisors to harass us. They want to oversee us like a concentration camp.

“If they see two workers talking to each other they complain of ‘congregating,’” said Jones. “They have a slave master’s mentality, always looking to get more from us for less.

“Everybody’s treated just like a number now.

They're doing the same thing in the public schools. But children aren't corporate pieces. The Democrats are not a 'people's party.' What's changed with Obama? It's only gotten worse.

"They buy people off," he said. "They did that with the head of our union."

The MTA last year reimplemented a program to secure cleaning positions through the City's Work Experience Program. The program forces welfare recipients to provide free labor to the city, displacing regular MTA employees.

White spoke to several welfare recipients working in subway maintenance, saying that his campaign demands the right to a decent job and a decent income for everyone, in addition to the right to free health care and education.

White and his supporters encountered widespread disillusionment and disaffection with the Obama administration. Erydiam Molina, a delivery worker originally from South America, said, "Obama is a traitor; he lied to us. I told all my friends to vote for him; now I feel guilty. He's only changed things for the worse.

"All our rights are being taken. The government is supposed to work for us; for jobs, education and health—but they aren't. They only work for the corporations.

"The main point of socialism is the people in control of government," added Molina. "And I agree with that."



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