

SEP presidential candidate Jerry White campaigns in Boston

Kate Randall
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SEP presidential candidate Jerry White campaigned Tuesday in Boston, Massachusetts. A team joined White at Ruggles station in the afternoon, where the candidate had the opportunity to speak with high school students, workers and other commuters passing through the busy MBTA stop.

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority is in the midst of imposing deep cuts to the transit system in the Greater Boston area, involving fair hikes, the elimination of bus and commuter rail lines, and attacks on transit workers' jobs.

The SEP has been campaigning at a series of public hearings on the proposed MBTA cuts, raising the issue of the defense of public transit as a social right. Several transit workers passing through the station expressed concern over the threat to cut hundreds of workers' jobs.

White spoke to Novelette, originally from Jamaica, who took an SEP campaign flyer. She said, "Obama isn't doing anything. He doesn't want to get in a fight with the Republicans. We should have universal health care; we should have free education.

"When students leave school they can't even get a job." She said she had two student loans—"\$10,000 and \$20,000, plus interest."

A group of students from the O'Bryant School of Math & Science had just gotten off school and stopped to talk to White. When asked about the conditions facing young people, they said that a lot of summer jobs had been cut last year and more cuts were coming this summer.

They said young people didn't have any places to go to hang out with friends.

One student described her school as a "prison." "There's mice, the place is dirty, and the food is lousy," she said. "All we get is reheated frozen pizza."

Another commented on the Trayvon Martin case: "It's totally unacceptable that no one's been arrested. It's ridiculous. The person who threw flour on Kim Kardashian the other day even got arrested." The O'Bryant students took the SEP campaign material and said they would consider supporting the SEP in the elections.

Later in the evening, White addressed a public meeting at the nearby YMCA, adjacent to Northeastern University, which was attended by a number of students and workers from the Boston area. The Boston appearance followed a series of successful meetings in Kingston, Ontario and New York City by the SEP presidential candidate.

In his remarks, White explained that the SEP campaign was the only alternative to the Democrats and Republicans, which were planning deep attacks on the social rights and conditions of the working class, along with

the threat of new military aggression.

"Despite the overwhelming opposition to war," he said, "and after more than a decade of disastrous wars, measures have already been put into motion for far bloodier interventions in Syria and Iran, which carry with them the seeds of another world war."

Coinciding with this neo-colonial policy, he said, "is the unprecedented attack on democratic rights—from the expansion of domestic spying, to unconstitutional powers claimed by the president to indefinitely detain or even assassinate US citizens without due process."

The presidential candidate gave a detailed account of the growth of social inequality in the United States. He also pointed to critical experiences of the international working class—from last year's "Arab Spring" in the Middle East and North Africa, to the recent lockout of workers at Cooper Tire in Ohio, to the ongoing mass student strike in Quebec against tuition hikes. He stressed that the fundamental experience that came out of all these struggles was the need for a new political leadership of the working class.

In the discussion period that followed, White fielded questions on a wide range of topics, —the ultimate aim of the SEP election campaign, the Obama administration's policy claiming the right to assassinate US citizens, the collapse of the USSR, and the role of the trade unions.

The first questioner asked, "If, hypothetically, you don't win the 2012 elections, what do you want to draw attention to?"

"What we're seeking to do is build a leadership, to build our party," White answered. "We want to build the ISSE on campuses throughout the country, and the Socialist Equality Party.

"We know that there are going to be enormous struggles. But in those struggles there has to be a leadership that is conscious of the lessons of history; that is conscious of the politics that are always used to divide the working class. They try to pit American workers against workers in China, or in Mexico. Or use racial politics to divert attention from the fundamental question of class.

"For example, in the Trayvon Martin case, you have Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson. Jackson is saying rather than protesting everyone should go out and register to vote. So he says you should go out and register to vote for Obama because somehow Obama is going to protect the lives of working class black youth."

Another audience member asked whether the offensive against the working class in the US in the 1980s was related to the fall of the USSR and the regimes in Eastern Europe.

“These were very much integrated processes,” White said, “With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States now had what it called a ‘unipolar moment’; it was now the sole superpower. So it sought to achieve what it couldn’t achieve while the Soviet Union still existed in the aftermath of the Second World War. And it continues to seek complete hegemony over the world.”

White referred to the analysis of Leon Trotsky: “The Soviet Union had to be reintegrated into the world economy in one of two ways. Either, as Trotsky advocated as early as the 1930s, through the overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the integration of the Soviet Union into the world economy on the basis of world socialism; or the Stalinist bureaucracy would devour the workers’ state and reintegrate into the world economy on the basis of capitalism. And that’s what happened in 1990-91.

“We drew very definite conclusions from this development. If the Stalinist bureaucracy, the head of the biggest workers’ organization in the world, could restore capitalism, could destroy what remained of the achievements of the Russian Revolution, then what would be the reaction of every other workers’ organization in the face of globalization?

“Could you call the AFL-CIO a workers’ organization that could somehow be pressured into defending the workers? The old labor parties, the old bourgeois national movements, every organization that based itself on nationalism in the face of the global economy—they all went on to suppress the class struggle and to collaborate in the lowering of living standards.”

A follow-up question dealt with the role of the trade unions. “I certainly agree with you that there are limitations on what unions are doing,” commented one worker, “and that the leadership they are providing is not ideal. At the same time, we’re still in a situation where union workers make better wages than nonunion workers, by and large.”

He added, “And also when you’re in a union you don’t work ‘at will.’ So with all their weaknesses, unions operate as a check on that. So I’m not quite sure that we should dismiss unions at this point.”

White responded that whatever wage differential may exist between unionized workers and others is the product of past struggles, which these organizations have thoroughly repudiated.

“As I sought to make clear in my report,” he said, “the corporatist policies of the unions, the labor-management partnership, is not isolated to the United States, it exists everywhere.

“The trade unions in Britain are doing the same thing. The trade unions in Greece may call one-day strikes, but they have supported the PASOK government, which has spearheaded the austerity. Everywhere in the world the unions are playing the role of the enforcers of wage-cutting.

“The United Auto Workers cut the wages of workers in half, from \$28 to \$14 for a new generation of workers. We are not just talking about bad leaders, but the bad leaders are an expression of organizations that have transformed themselves over decades.

“The unions were built by socialists. The Trotskyists, our party, played the leading role in the building of the Teamsters union in the 1934 strike in Minneapolis. But the socialists and left-wing trade militants were purged from the unions in the 1940s, and the unions solidified their alliance with the Democratic Party on the basis of nationalism.

“When American capitalism faced competition from Germany and Japan by the late 1970s and ‘80s, the unions abandoned any class struggle. The unions today completely agree with wage-cutting. Those union officials earning more than \$150,000 tripled between 2000 and 2008. Five top union officials now receive more than \$500,000 just in salary. The unions also control massive pension funds worth billions of dollars and are involved deeply in investments.

“So you’re not talking about good organizations that simply have a wart on them, and that you just need to get rid of this wart. This is the perspective of every ex-left group there is: from the International Socialist Organization, to the Spartacist League. All of them say that all you’ve got to do is get rid of the unions’ tops. These organizations may call themselves socialists, but they’re not. Their politics correspond with the interests of a privileged layer of the upper-middle class.

“The unions are prisons for workers. The unions enforce the suppression of strikes. This was the experience of the Cooper Tire workers in Findlay, Ohio. The workers there also rejected a 50 percent cut, accepted by the United Steel Workers union, and they were locked out for three months.

“The Steelworkers have a \$350 million strike fund and it pays its top officials hundreds of thousands of dollars. But they were giving these workers grocery cards, a gift card at Kroger for \$100 a week. They were helping the company starve the workers back to work. Then they isolated the workers in Findlay by signing a contract in Texarkana, Arkansas, doing everything that they could to break up the unity of the working class.”

In the informal discussion following the meeting, several people expressed interest in joining the SEP or setting up at an ISSE chapter. Copies of *In Defense of Leon Trotsky* were sold, along with *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*.



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