

Jerry White explains socialist perspective in Northern California meetings

Our reporter
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On Sunday and Tuesday, SEP presidential candidate Jerry White spoke at meetings in Berkeley and Sacramento, California. The meetings were well-attended and included a wide-ranging discussion on the basic issues raised by the campaign.

At both meetings, White outlined the program of the SEP, connecting the struggles of workers for their basic rights to the fight for socialism. Those attending responded with enthusiasm, and discussion continued well after the formal end of the meetings. The meetings established a firm foundation widely promoting the SEP's program in Northern California.

Sacramento, California

In Sacramento, White focused his remarks on the danger of war. He reviewed the significance of the latest massacre of at least 16 Afghan civilians in Kandahar, attributed to one US soldier. (See, "The Kandahar massacre and the fight against war")

"In 2008, millions of workers and young people voted for president Obama in order to put an end to the wars waged on the basis of lies, torture, and the attack on basic rights associated with Bush's bogus 'war on terror,'" White said. "Not only has Obama continued these wars, he has escalated them."

"US forces are conducting a bloody colonial war against the entire population in Afghanistan... It is impossible to separate what happened on Sunday from what has happened over the past 10 years. Hundreds of thousands have died at the hands of the Pentagon over the past decade."

White reviewed US plans for war against Syria and Iran, and the danger of world war. "To the American people, the prospect of another war seems like insanity. Yet wars cannot be stopped by appealing to the reason of the corporate and financial elite. War is inherent in the capitalist system itself. Socialism arises objectively because the present system,

capitalism, cannot overcome its basic contradictions."

During the discussion, one student asked what the socialist response was to the situation in Syria.

"Syria is only the latest example of the attempts by the former colonial powers, the United States and the European powers, to reestablish control of these regions. We are totally opposed to a US invasion of Syria. It is necessary to immunize oneself from the media campaign for 'human rights.' Such arguments were used to justify war against Libya, and the result has been an even greater disaster. It is the task of the working class to deal with [Syrian president] Assad, not imperialism."

The student argued that something had to be done immediately, that it was necessary for the "international community" to intervene to prevent a crackdown. "It is always necessary to be critical of concepts," White replied. "What does 'international community' mean? There are definite class interests involved. The same arguments were used to justify the attack on Iraq. It is necessary always to take the standpoint of the interests of the working class."

After the meeting, White spoke at length with three students and young workers: Viktor, an after-school teacher; Alejandra, a student in speech pathology, and Brian, a student in criminal justice.

Brian said, "The meeting was eye-opening. I wanted to learn about the socialist position on everything. I am still going to stay a Democrat, but that does not mean that I don't support the ideals expressed in this meeting."

This set off a lengthy discussion on the nature of the Democratic Party and whether it was possible for it to represent the interests of working people. An ISSE member recounted his own experiences trying to work within the Democratic Party, explaining how he came to realize that the party was thoroughly corrupt and beholden to corporate interests.

Brian said he thought it was possible to work within the framework of capitalism while incorporating some of the ideals of socialism. "The interests of the working class and the corporate elite are not reconcilable," White replied. "The ruling class is determined to enforce deep attacks on all the rights of working people. As they fight for these rights, workers will come into direct conflict with the entire social system, along with the political representatives of the ruling class, including

the Democratic Party.”

Alejandra said, “I think that [White] made many good points. The views of workers are not represented. I am Hispanic and working class. My parents are immigrants. They have been here for 20 years. They don’t vote. The working class has to be educated, but many have very little schooling.”

White replied by referring to the history of public education. “The working class had to fight for the right to have an education, and this is now being taken away. I went to the City University of New York, where tuition was free up until 1975. Now, look at what is happening. They are literally pricing out working class youth.”

Alejandra noted that tuition increased 18 percent at Cal State Sacramento this year, on top of increases of 12 percent in 2010 and 12 percent in 2009.

Asked about the impact of such cuts, Brian said that one of his friends had to drop out and go back to home in Southern California to save up money to pay tuition later. Viktor said he himself was not going to school now, so that he could save money to afford it. “Even textbooks are too expensive.”

Berkeley, California

In Berkeley, White focused on the far-reaching implications of the speech by Obama administration Attorney General Eric Holder last week, which asserted the right of the president to assassinate US citizens without any judicial review. (See, “How to fight Obama’s police-state policies”)

“Holder boldly states, and this goes further than anything that Bush put forward,” White explained, quoting from the speech, “that ‘Our government has the clear authority... to defend the United States through the lawful use of lethal force... US citizenship alone does not make such individuals immune from being targeted.’”

White noted that Holder acknowledged that there are “constitutional considerations,” including the Fifth Amendment’s due process clause. “According to Holder, however, due process does not mean ‘judicial process.’ It doesn’t mean a court of law, evidence, proof, being able to challenge your accuser. He goes on to make an argument that due process only means that the president has allowed this ‘due process’ to filter through his brain, and then decides to kill someone. This is an argument for presidential dictatorship.”

Berkeley is a center of middle class pseudo-left politics, and White made a point of stressing the vast gulf that separates this type of politics from the working class perspective advanced by the SEP.

White noted that, in addition to the growth of the financial aristocracy, a section of the upper middle class had increased its wealth significantly over the past three decades. It was this

layer, including sections of academia wedded to identity politics as well as the trade union executives, which actively supported the right-wing policies of the Obama administration.

These issues were further elaborated in the discussion period. One member of the Peace and Freedom Party expressed contempt for the working class, asking how workers could be convinced to “want better things in life, instead of just going home, beating their wives, and watching TV or whatever they do to get by.”

“We reject this attitude to the working class,” White explained. He condemned the politics of middle class groups like the Peace and Freedom Party, which are oriented to the Democratic Party. “When they don’t openly support the Democrats they insist this big business party can be pressured to pass progressive measures. We are fighting not for a moderated capitalism but for socialism and real workers’ control of the economy.”

Not liking the answer, the questioner abruptly left the meeting.

Another student asked about the SEP’s attitude toward identity politics.” The SEP is a party of the working class,” White replied. “Class struggle unites the workers across race and gender lines, because we are fighting for the betterment of all the workers. We are opposed to affirmative action and identity politics, which serve to pit workers against each other while accepting the framework of the capitalist system.

“What has this type of politics produced? Barack Obama, Condoleezza Rice, Hillary Clinton. We reject the premise of affirmative action that some people must be excluded from education and jobs, and that we need to fight over a dwindling number of opportunities.”

In the course of the discussion, SEP supporters stressed the importance of the party’s historical perspective. There was extensive comments on the significance of the campaign in defense of Leon Trotsky and against the historical falsifications contained in the recent biography by Robert Service. Several of those attending purchased copies of David North’s *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*.

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