

SEP campaign and public meeting at Portland State University

Our reporter
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Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White concluded his West Coast tour on Wednesday with a public meeting at Portland State University in Oregon. Prior to the meeting, White and supporters campaigned on the PSU campus, receiving a warm response from students.

As in early meetings, White spoke on the basic issues raised in the SEP campaign—the danger of war, the attack on democratic rights, the extraordinary growth of social inequality, and the socialist response. (See “Jerry White explains socialist perspective in northern California meetings”.)

In the context of the US war drive against Iran and Syria, and the latest atrocity carried out by a US soldier in Afghanistan, White discussed the significance of the meeting between President Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron at the White House that day.

“Referring to Sunday’s massacre of 16 civilians, including nine children by a US soldier, as a ‘complication,’ Obama made it clear there would be no quick withdrawal from Afghanistan,” White said. “Standing side by side with Cameron, a representative of British imperialism—which is engaged in its third war to subjugate Afghanistan—Obama praised the “special relationship” with Britain, and then proceeded to threaten joint military action against Syria and Iran.

“For his part, Cameron reportedly sought approval from the president for England’s imperialist banditry in the South Atlantic, where the British have recently sent a battleship to reinforce its colonial control over Argentina’s Malvinas Islands, an area where rich oil reserves have been discovered.”

White explained that the drive toward war was rooted in the long-term fundamental contradictions of the

capitalist system, and that the fight against war had to be connected to an independent socialist movement of the working class. This became the subject of further questions and discussions after the lecture.

“The Chinese and Russians see what is happening in Syria, and they see the writing on the wall,” White said in reply to a question about the danger of world war. “There are very real conflicts emerging... The Obama administration came into power saying that the war in Iraq was a diversion from the bigger geopolitical interests of the United States, above all the dispute with China.”

“The more production is socialized—billions around the world are engaged in the production of all the wealth of society—the more that comes into conflict with the subordination of the economy to the interests of private owners,” he explained. “The more the world becomes integrated, the more it comes into conflict with the nation-state system, which manifests itself in the conflict over resources and markets. That is what produced World War I and World War II.”

White’s remarks were met with an enthusiastic response from those attending. In Portland, as at many of the meetings organized by the SEP, young people expressed concern about how the struggle for socialism could be carried forward. Wade, a student from Eugene, Oregon, asked, “How do you counter the promotion of backwardness by the media and the lies about socialism that are made?”

“Everything is done to prevent a socialist perspective from being heard,” White replied. “That itself is a measure of how dangerous socialism is to the ruling class. There are now polls showing that among young people, the majority supports socialism over capitalism,

even if they quite don't know what socialism is.

“Capitalism is doing the heavy work; it is discrediting itself every single day. We don't see our major job as calling on workers to fight. They are going to fight. They have no choice. The key question is having a political leadership, having a political party.”

White stressed the importance of a historical perspective, discussing the SEP's roots in the struggle by Leon Trotsky against the betrayal of the Russian Revolution. “Over the last several years there have been several books put out, including by very prominent publishers, with the most scurrilous attacks on Trotsky, the latest coming from Robert Service. They are an effort to try to prevent young people from reading about Trotsky, from learning about his ideas. It is an effort to try to cut this generation off from an international socialist strategy.

“We will make use of every type of media to promote the SEP campaign, but we need your support. The only way we can circumvent the official news blackout is for workers like yourself to go into your workplaces, into your schools, and make this program known. The great ideas defended by our party are going to meet up with the growing desire for a new program and perspective.

“We fight with enormous confidence. I have heard so many ex-lefts and liberals declaring, ‘you have to vote for Obama because the Republicans are coming, and it's armageddon.’ The workers are all Tea Party, they insist. They all have the utmost contempt for the working class. To tell you the truth, I don't think they ever talk to workers! The fact is that the working class is moving to the left. All this pessimism and skepticism that is promoted, in the end, what is it for? Voting for Obama.”

A member of the Freedom Socialist Party, which is deeply embedded in identity politics, asked about the position of the SEP on immigrants and women. “We are opposed to all forms of discrimination,” White replied, elaborating on the SEP's demand for open borders. “What we reject,” he explained, “is that the answer to these problems is affirmative action and similar policies. Such programs take as their premise that there are not enough jobs and education available. We reject this. We insist that everyone has the right to a job, to a quality education.

“Instead of dividing workers against each other, we insist on the necessity to fight for the greatest unity of

the working class, black, white, immigrant, men and women, in a common struggle for socialism.”

White reviewed the history of affirmative action and identity politics, which culminated in the election of Barack Obama. “This is not working class politics, but upper middle class politics.”

During the campaigning before the meeting, White and other SEP supporters engaged in many discussions with students on the basic issues confronting the working class.

Emily Rush, a general sciences student, asked about the “lesser-of-two evils” argument used to support the Democratic Party.

“This has been used for decades to block the working class from breaking with the two big business parties,” White replied. “Workers and young people voted for Obama because they hated the wars, the attack on democratic rights, the bank bailouts. Yet what has happened? All the same policies have been expanded. The arguments carted out to support Obama, including the identity politics of the ‘left’ are wearing thin.”

Emily expressed the frustration of many young people with the entire political system: “A lot of people are having issues with any politics. It is all corrupt. Whoever has the most money wins. Obama is putting on a persona that is not there. We all feel hopeless.”

“There is a way forward,” White replied. “We need to fight for a different type of politics. The working class has to build a party that represents its independent interests.”

White will be traveling to New York and Boston for a series of meetings later in March. For more information, visit the SEP web site: socialequality.com



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