

SEP campaigns against cuts in Detroit

A WSWS reporting team
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Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party spoke to workers and young people at a transit center at the old state fairgrounds in Detroit about the policies of SEP election campaign, Jerry White for president and Phyllis Scherrer vice president.

Campaigners distributed copies of a statement issued by White, “No to bankers dictatorship in Detroit,” opposing the recent cuts announced by the administration of Democratic Detroit Mayor David Bing. The mayor’s proposed new budget contains huge attacks on city workers and massive cuts in public services.

Among the cuts contained in the new budget are the layoff of 162 of 450 Detroit firefighters, a 50 percent reduction in the parks and recreation budget and the layoff of 82 library employees. The Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), already at the point of collapse after round after round of cuts, faces privatization and the loss of \$10 million in subsidies from the city. Transit users in Detroit already face the end of 24-hour service and cuts to the weekend schedule.

The statement by White calls for workers to mobilize against this latest round of cuts by building new organizations of struggle independent of the unions and the Democratic Party. White stressed the need for the working class to break with the Democrats and Republicans and build a political party of its own based on a socialist program.

SEP supporters spoke to workers and young people about the impact of the latest cuts and explained the socialist answer to the attacks being carried out in Detroit. SEP supporters saw first hand evidence of the cuts at the state fair ground transit center. Restrooms were closed and water fountains did not work. A notice

informed bus riders that new schedules weren’t available.

Dujuan Knighten said, “Dave Bing and [Michigan Governor] Rick Snyder are working together to destroy us. Just because we catch the bus we aren’t lower class.”

Knighten described his experiences with the recent cutbacks in bus service. “I have been getting stuck. The last bus stops running between 11:30 and 12:00 pm. When I am downtown I have to go to the casino and wait until the next bus starts running between 4:30 and 5:00 am. That isn’t fair. I am 26 years old. Everyone who has to get to work at one or two in the morning has got to catch cabs. The cab fare is like \$5 - \$10. Times five days a week, that’s your whole check. It is a crime what Rick Snyder and the mayor are doing.

“I have been looking for a job the last five months. People are saying they are not hiring—the city is broke.”

When asked about the Obama administration, Dujuan indicated he supported Obama. “But he could do more for Detroit,” he added. “We are heading like toward 1967,” Dujuan said referring to the Detroit riots. “I feel that is the way it is going. We have gotten into wars because of oil. It is the rich against the poor.”

Campaigners reviewed the policies of the Obama administration in relation to Detroit, including support for the privatization of education and the forced restructuring of the auto industry, which involved the imposition of poverty-level wages on new auto-workers.

Retonya Williams is a driver for SMART, the regional transportation system for southeastern Michigan.

“The SMART system is getting cut too, not just DDOT. We took a \$700 cut after paying for our own retirement. Our bills aren’t getting any lower and gas is getting higher.

“If you’re a working person trying to makes ends meet, yeah somebody should be fighting for you.”

A bus rider, Letena, who works as a cashier in a restaurant said, “If they cut the buses, how are people going to get back and forth to work? I have been at my job five years catching the bus. With the bus service cut down that’s going to be real hard.

“They need to fire everybody who is there now and start over.” Letena said she had voted for Obama. “I liked the Obama administration because he was black, but really it is no better. There is no change. I guess being black we thought there was going to be a lot of change.”

SEP supporters explained that the fundamental division in society was not race but class.

“You are right, it is more rich and poor”, said Letena. “I do think we as a people have got to try to make a change.”

Another bus rider said, “It’s when I have to catch the DDOT I have problems. I use the bus for everything. Now that they have switched everything I don’t know what is going on with the buses. I go to the transit center and look for the little papers that tell what time the buses come. They don’t have those. You are at their mercy.

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“When I lived in Detroit we voted money to keep the libraries open. Now they are getting ready to close them. It doesn’t make any sense. I am amazed and confused. What is happening is not right.” Campaigners explained that what was taking place in Detroit was a microcosm of attacks being carried out on working people all over the world, citing the example of Greece. In response she remarked, “I am wondering when they are going to start firing on us for protesting.”

Elijah Alexander said he was angered by all the cuts. “When they started closing schools, the most ludicrous thing is they started by closing the elementary schools. Those kinds of people making those kinds of decisions don’t belong there.”

When asked his opinion of the Obama administration Elijah indicated he had hopes in Obama. However, he added, “We are relying on these people, but they are saying one thing and doing something else. We are being forced to do something. It is going to happen.”

Ronald, a young worker, said, “If there is a war going on. America always goes in there first. Americans need jobs. I hope Obama is not going to war in Iran. I don’t want to see that. What is next after that? North Korea?”

Dave Hart, a former auto-worker, is currently on disability. He expressed concern over the lack of jobs. “They made their money by manufacturing, now they have taken that away. The local Joe has no chance at making a dime.”

Dave said that he was a Democrat and felt Obama was doing “the best he can,” adding, “which is not that good.” He continued, “I agree the system needs revamping. You don’t have to go to school to see that. It is an unholy mess because there are simply not enough jobs.

“The first thing that went wrong is when you had businesses dictating policy. When you have business dictating policy you are already in a hot mess, because human needs are automatically taken out. If they had their way, every child would be in there working.

SEP supporters explained that Jerry White was calling for the working class to break with the two parties of big business and build a party of its own. “Let me put it like this,” said Dave, “you couldn’t do any worse.” He added, “Most of the leaders in the 1960s were talking that solidarity stuff. But, they didn’t teach their children that. They became part of the middle class, part of the problem... You need a total restructuring of the system.”



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