

Jerry White speaks at the University of South Florida

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Socialist Equality Party candidate for US president Jerry White visited University of South Florida in Tampa on Monday to speak about the issues facing the working class in the 2012 elections. The meeting was attended by about twenty students and workers from throughout the area.

White explained that the SEP was intervening in the elections to fight for a socialist program for the working class, in opposition to the Democrats and Republicans. He talked about war, the attack on democratic rights, and the growth of social inequality.

The SEP candidate focused his talk on the killing of Trayvon Martin nearly two months ago in nearby Sanford, Florida. “The shooting of the unarmed young man, and the fact that his killer, George Zimmerman, has not been arrested or charged with any crime, has sparked deep outrage and protests in Florida and throughout the country,” White said. He reviewed the social and political background to the killing of Martin, including the promotion of right-wing vigilante laws and the social and economic tensions building up in American society.

White also reviewed the role of racial politics, as promoted by Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and their periphery among middle class groups oriented to the Democratic Party. “These forces have put forward a grossly distorted picture of American society, politics and history,” he noted, “one in which race, and not class, is the central issue.” The aim of this type of politics has been to prevent an independent movement of the working class of all races, and channel opposition back in to the political establishment.

White discussed the history of affirmative action, and the way in which it has been promoted and adopted by

sections of the ruling class over the past 30 years. In the process, there has been a vast growth of inequality within the African-American population, as a small layer has benefited even as the vast majority has suffered a decline in living standards. This culminated in the election of Obama, who is overseeing a historic attack on the entire working class.

Discussion and questions after the presentation touched on many fundamental issues raised by the SEP campaign.

Nathaniel, a USF undergraduate student, said, “It is obvious that you can’t win this election against two big parties like the Democrats and Republicans. What impact do you hope to have?”

White replied by explaining that the purpose of the campaign was to fight for a socialist program in the working class, and that there is an immense and growing audience for a new perspective. “We have undemocratic ballot access laws in this country,” he noted, “but we will get in where we can and organize effective write-in campaigns elsewhere.”

The SEP was raising issues that no one else was talking about, he said. “No other parties are discussing important issues such as preparation for war with Iran. A war against Iran would necessitate a draft of American youth, but you hear absolutely no discussion about this from any media outlet.”

Following the meeting, Nathaniel inquired about ISSE chapters in southern California, where he plans to attend graduate school. He asked, “How can your program work on an international level?” ISSE member Matthew responded, “Working class people living in other countries are beset with the same problems that we confront. The ruling class seeks to divide workers

along national and racial lines. This is why identity politics is so harmful to our class. We must establish leadership in countries all over the world so that we can unite workers in a common struggle.”

Part of Whites’s lecture explained how the ruling class has seized on the economic crisis to slash jobs and wages, a campaign that has been spearheaded by the Obama administration. Autoworkers have seen a wage cut of 50 percent for new hires, he noted.

One young student said that he thought \$12 or \$14 wages are good enough for people who are having trouble finding work. “People don’t really need boats or any of those extra things, and students can try to go to community college first if their parents can’t afford to pay for their education,” he suggested.

To this White responded by noting that \$12 an hour was a poverty level wage for a family of four. “These cuts are not due to any absence of resources. Capitalism is subordinate to the profit demands and wealth of a small layer of the population.”

Eulogio, a professor from Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, drove more than five hours to attend the meeting in Tampa. “To expand on the issue of lower wages, this trend will continue in different industries. The outcome of this is that not everyone will have the opportunity for employment. This means that there will be no money in the pockets of workers and thus no demand. The economy will stagnate again. Who will buy the capitalists’ products if there is no money?”

Jack McGuire, a retired worker, asked White, “How are you going to convince us not to be afraid of the word ‘socialism?’ People are afraid to even say the word out loud sometimes.” White replied, “There have been two bulwarks against socialism. They are Stalinism and the wealth of American Capitalism. During the 1940’s, the unions carried out anti-communist purges in organizations that were built by socialists. The CIO would never have been created if it weren’t for socialists!”

He continued, “The fact is this: the Soviet Union was not socialist. The success of the Russian Revolution of 1917, which was a workers revolution, depended on the expansion of revolution internationally, which did not occur. During the 1920’s, Stalin developed the anti-

Marxist theory of ‘socialism in one country,’ to justify the political betrayal of the international working class. The bureaucracy carried out the physical liquidation of all the old Bolsheviks.

“Before Trotsky was himself murdered in 1940, he predicted that if Russia’s working class did not carry out a political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy, as part of an international socialist revolution, the bureaucracy would restore capitalism. He predicted this in 1936, more than 50 years before it actually happened.”

The ruling class used Stalinism as an argument against socialism, White said. They also argued that capitalism could provide workers with a decent standard of living. Now, the defenders of capitalism insist that their system depends upon the impoverishment of the working class.

“According to recent surveys, more young people have a favorable view of socialism than they do of capitalism. Young people are definitely not afraid of socialism. There are big changes in consciousness taking place, but what is needed above all is a new political leadership.”



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