

Jerry White visits Cooper Tire workers and Michigan students

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Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White visited Findlay, Ohio on Wednesday, to speak to Cooper Tire workers at their afternoon shift change. The workers returned to the job a month ago after being locked-out for three months for voting against a concessions contract.

After locking out all 1,050 workers, Cooper management hired replacement workers. The workers were defiant and determined as they manned picket lines around the plant for the entire lockout. Their struggle was betrayed by the United Steelworkers union, which isolated the workers in Findlay and ultimately pushed through the contract demanded by the company.

White and his supporters handed out hundreds of copies of the “Cooper Tire Worker Newsletter,” published by the *World Socialist Web Site*, with a lead article on “The Lessons of the Cooper Tire struggle.”

Several workers told White they were angered over being on the picket lines for three months and not gaining anything. Many readily agreed that their struggle had been betrayed by the United Steelworkers union. Several expressed disgust with Obama and the policies of both parties, and expressed interest in White’s campaign and the struggle to build a political movement of the working class against the profit system.

Mark, a young worker with five years at the plant, said, “Wages are being cut everywhere, but the cost of things you need keeps going up. The rich are getting richer, and you can’t trust any of the politicians. No one speaks for the working class.”

When White explained that the SEP was fighting for the working class to take over the factories and industries and run them for human need, Mark said, “That’s what we really need. The rich are taking everything from us. I’m working 60 to 72 hours a week just to get by.”

Another young worker, Tyson, said, “The company planned the lockout well in advance. That is why they played hardball from the beginning. I hired in last June at 85 percent of the top pay, and I’m never going to reach the top. And in the next contract they might take even more away.”

One skilled worker said, “I’m a vet and former Marine. I’ve never felt so threatened before. We just don’t know what kind of future we are going to have here—and it’s the same everywhere.”

Jerry, a younger worker at the plant, said, “Things have gotten back to normal since the lockout ended. We were expecting more for staying out so long, but it didn’t happen. Some of us are wondering if we were out there for no reason. We tried to fight, but it didn’t go anywhere.

“There’s going to be a revolt in this country if things don’t change,” said another Cooper Tire worker who is also a farmer. “The companies are pitting workers against each other. Then they are driving up fuel prices so we can’t afford anything.”

“It doesn’t matter if you’re in a union or a non-union shop. Every company in the world is cutting wages for new workers. It is happening with the UAW and GM. The government is getting its pockets full with the almighty dollar. Who is going to fight for the workers? We wanted to stop new workers from being paid lower wages, but they are going to be hit hardest by this new contract. No one is hiring workers at the same wages as the older workers. Soon it is going to be a 100 percent

low-wage workforce.”

Doug said, “You know, I’m not really a socialist, but I tell you what—I would vote socialist just to throw a wrench in the cog, you know what I mean? Just to stop this.”

Earlier in the day, White spoke at a meeting at Monroe County Community College in southeast Michigan, just north of Toledo, Ohio. White spoke on the economic crisis facing workers and young people, the attack on democratic rights and the US drive for war against Syria and Iran.

After White’s report, questions were raised by audience members. An older worker who came back to school for retraining after a layoff expressed great concern over the conditions of older workers and the lack of retirement benefits. He said that he was also worried about the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act, which sanctions indefinite detention without charge, and the other anti-democratic measures spearheaded by the Obama administration.

In response, White pointed to the raising of retirement ages in Greece and other European countries. He noted that Obama had already agreed with the Republicans to raise the eligibility age for Medicare.

Pointing to the state repression against Greek workers and the police crackdown on the anti-Wall Street protests, White explained that the erosion of democratic rights was also an international process. “Basic democratic protections,” he said, “are incompatible with the immense polarization of society and concentration of wealth and political power in the hands of the financial aristocracy.”

A question arose about former Democratic congressman Dennis Kucinich, who was presented by one of the audience members as a progressive who wanted to transform the economy to meet the needs of the people. White explained that Kucinich was a defender of the profit system who promoted the myth that the government would reregulate the finance industry. “Kucinich promotes Obama, who received more money from Wall Street than his Republican challenger in 2008, and who has served the interests of the banks ever since taking over the White House. Kucinich's chief role is to keep the working class tied to

the Democratic Party.”

The meeting was well attended and several students stayed for further discussion with the candidate.

Sean, a member of the International Students for Social Equality at MCCC said, “I was really happy that a presidential candidate made sure he was able to speak one-on-one with all the people that came out that wanted to speak with him, answered every question that was asked thoroughly. I don’t think there was any question that was left unanswered.”



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