

SEP campaigns at Eastern Market in Detroit

A reporting team
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On a warm morning this past Saturday, tens of thousands of residents from Detroit and the surrounding areas streamed past stalls of flowers and fresh produce at the historic Eastern Market, located between Gratiot and Mack Avenues on the city's east side.

A Socialist Equality Party campaign team spoke to hundreds of people, including auto workers, teachers, city workers, students, graduates, retirees and the unemployed. The scene and general mood was sunny and festive, but the political situation is becoming increasingly tense and polarized.

The Socialist Equality Party will host presidential candidate Jerry White at a public meeting at 2 pm next Saturday, at the First Unitarian-Universalist Church, which is located nearby at 4605 Cass Avenue.

Workers and young people spoke about the conditions they face.

Thirty-two-year-old William Scott is a life-long resident of Detroit. A father of three young children, he expressed concern over crumbling infrastructure. "There could be more money put into our schools."

"I've noticed many changes in my life," Scott said, "most have not been for the better. There are many abandoned buildings. The city has the Brewster Projects, huge buildings that could be renovated; but they are not being utilized for shelter."

Campaigners explained the SEP's call for a jobs program that would put people to work rebuilding schools, libraries, and housing. "If you have ten or twelve people out on the street, and ten to twelve abandoned buildings," William said, "then we should be able to house them."

"Manufacturing has collapsed. Due to layoffs in the Detroit area, drug use has risen. People still have to find a way to feed their families, so they begin selling drugs. There are police that have encouraged this and sell drugs themselves."

The SEP campaigners explained that the working

class had certain basic rights that it had to fight for. The most basic of these is the right to a job. A decent living standard, education, housing, medical care and retirement all flow from the same struggle, and are all equally essential to sustain life.

Bronston Storm, a hair stylist from Ann Arbor, home of the University of Michigan 40 miles to the west, was visiting the market with two friends from Detroit. Storm spoke about the crisis facing recent college graduates and the conditions that are radicalizing a generation of young people worldwide.

When he graduated from Northern Michigan University with a degree in International Relations and a concentration on Latin America, he went to work for a Fortune 500 corporation. "The bottom 20 percent of the workforce was doing 80 percent of the work," he said. He hated it, but there was nothing he could do about it. "That is why I quit and went to hair school."

He cited George Carlin: "If you believe in the American Dream, you have to be sleeping." Support for the American system, that is the capitalist system, is crumbling. "I do have student loans," he said, "close to \$40,000. I do not make enough to pay them, but I have a lot less than many people."

Student loans now exceed credit card debt to comprise the largest portion of consumer debt in America. "Many have a \$100,000 in debt and no job," he said. "I call it the University Industrial Complex. They pump money out of us chasing a piece of paper that is worthless. Some people are getting rich from the process. It blows my mind!"

Storm's friend Scarlett, 23, is a student of psychology at Wayne State University and moved from her home in the downriver suburbs into the Southwest section of Detroit. She said, "I moved back to oppose white flight." Large numbers of students and recent graduates are turning to Detroit in search of ways to oppose the decay of American society and the

disintegration of its industrial foundations. Scarlett was inspired by the recent walkout of students at Detroit's Southwestern High School.

"The students protested, because their school is scheduled to be closed and combined with another high school," she said. "They already feel that their education is substandard and inadequate, and they feel that the conditions will only get worse. Among other things, the merger of the two schools would promote fights and violence.

"They were demanding more for their education," Scarlett said, "and so they walked out." She went on to explain that in response to the students' protest, the school administration had suspended them for five days.

Southwest Detroit was once home to the giant Cadillac factory as well as others. Good jobs were plentiful. Since 1979, one after another of the factories closed. The ruling elite pursued a policy of deindustrialisation, shifting capital from industrial production to parasitic speculation in asset-stripping hedge funds. Both candidates for the Republican and Democratic Parties personify these policies.

As the factories closed, the decline of conditions in the city's neighborhoods was accelerated through regressive tax policy. Residents pay one of the highest rates of property tax, while city coffers were stripped by tax abatements for the corporations. Funds for schools, libraries, parks, pools and recreation centers were fleeced from the city budget and poured into the corporations. The decades-long war on the working class was supervised and endorsed by the various Democratic Party mayors, city councils and school boards that came and went.

"Obama is no different," said Bronston. "He is propagating the same policies as Bush. He should be tried as a war criminal also and suffer the same fate as prior war criminals." He had been in England when former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet was arrested and charged with murder, and the discussion ranged over the many crimes of American imperialism in Latin America.

Peggy Lewis is 66, retired and lives on the east side of Detroit. "If you spend time in this city," she said, "it is clear something is not right." Her neighborhood, like so many in Detroit, was beautiful when she moved in thirty years ago. Mature trees, manicured lawns and

smooth pavement were the norm. "Today, it is like someone dropped a bomb on it. There are raccoons in my attic, dope dealers on my block. There is a hole in my roof I can't get anybody to come and fix. It is a nightmare.

"Sunday before last, my dog started barking. I couldn't see because it was too dark. The next day, I realized that someone had ripped the whole porch off one of the houses. You cannot get the police to respond to anything. When you are old and trapped, you can't do anything. My house is paid for. I can't leave."

In conjunction with CAUS, the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs, the SEP fights for the social right to basic utilities, gas, electricity, water and sewer. We discussed the way in which wealthy investors in the utility companies extract money from the city's poorest residents. "It is sad, pathetic, for DTE to make money like that," Peggy said. "If you don't have money... I want to cry. But I won't."

"My job was outsourced. I was a cook at the Mt. Clemens hospital. I think the hospital has been bought and turned over several times since then. I'll tell you what I think the problem is. Greed has destroyed this country."



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