Socialist Equality Party holds meeting on the crisis in Detroit and the 2012 elections

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"Detroit is one of the starkest examples of the failure of capitalism," began Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White in remarks at an election meeting held near the Wayne State University (WSU) campus in Detroit, Michigan on Saturday.

The meeting brought together Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) riders fighting the city cuts, Committee Against Utility Shutoff (CAUS) members, teachers, young professionals, college students and other Detroit-area workers.

Lawrence Porter, the assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party, opened the meeting by describing the situation facing Detroit workers. The city government of Democratic Mayor David Bing and the city council have reached an agreement with the state government of Republican Governor Rick Snyder to impose devastating cuts in social services and wages.

White reviewed the historical background to the present attack. "So shocking has been the city's decline," he said, "that it has become a destination for photographers and artists from the around the world who examine the empty factories and abandoned neighborhoods like archeologists gathering artifacts and evidence of a long lost civilization.

"After more than a century since the introduction of the assembly line and the extraction of trillions of dollars in profit from the labor of generations of workers, the auto magnates and bankers have left the city in ruins and the working population in Third World conditions," the candidate stated.

White cited the landmark study of Marxism's co-founder, Frederick Engels, entitled T*he Conditions of the Working Class in England*. The book, written in 1845, universally considered a masterpiece of sociological investigation, indicted the poverty created by capitalism as "disguised, malicious murder", a social crime.

The horrific statistics of Detroit—an unofficial unemployment of 50 percent, an infant mortality rate equal to that of Dominican Republic, and a public education system that lies in tatters—constitute no less a social crime today, White said.

In explaining the political context of the city's collapse, White emphasized the role of the Democratic Party, which has run Detroit for decades, as well as the trade unions, which have collaborated in the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs.

The Obama administration now sees Detroit as a "model" for the US—a model of poverty wages, privatized schools, and the destruction of social programs. "On this basis of a historic reduction in labor costs" as a result of Obama's restructuring of the industry, "the auto companies have been able to return to profitability, pulling in record amounts from the sale of far fewer cars."

What is happening in Detroit is happening throughout the country and internationally, White stressed. Workers are beginning to fight back, but the most basic question is that of political leadership.

"Whether Obama or Romney is in the White House next year, the efforts by the corporate and financial elite to make the working class pay for the crisis of American and world capitalism will drive the working class in the US into major social struggles alongside our brothers and sisters in Europe and around the world."

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He ended by calling on all those attending to become involved in the campaign and fight to build the Socialist Equality Party.

After the report, the audience asked many questions. One person in attendance raised issue of race and the attitude of white communities to the socialist campaign. White responded by stressing that the program of the SEP expressed the interests of the entire working class—that the fundamental issue was class, not race. The struggle for a class orientation was particularly important in Detroit, which has a long legacy of racial politics.

White said that the perspective of groups like By Any Means Necessary (BAMN), and other organization around the Democratic Party, was to call for "home rule" of Detroit. Their aim is to subordinate the working class to the black elite in Detroit, and thereby maintain the political stranglehold of the parties of big business.

Charlene, who has been involved in protests against attacks on the bus system in the city, asked whether White would change his positions if elected. "When they run for office, politicians talk a good game. But once they get in, everything changes."

White responded by explaining that the SEP campaign was not like other campaigns, that its purpose was to build a political leadership in the working class. "The working class has to take power," White said, "and reorganize society in the interests of social need. We are running not primarily for votes, but for the political mobilization of the working class. The changes we seek will not happen through elections. They will be realized through the working class entering a struggle."

White explained that the SEP was fighting to organize workers throughout the city and across the country. He insisted that such a struggle had to be independent of the official trade unions, which are aligned with the Democratic Party and have participated in the attack on the workers they claim to represent.

Toward the end of the meeting, the Wayne State University ISSE president endorsed White's report and emphasizing the plight of students facing a lifetime of debt with few job prospects. She pointed out that last year, Wayne State funding was cut by Governor Rick Snyder by 15 percent, and the university responded by increase fees 6.9 percent.

"The impoverishment of young people has had a devastating impact on all of society.The young generation must, by turning to the working class, defend itself or face poverty," she concluded.

White ended the meeting with a strong appeal for all those involved to support his campaign and join the Socialist Equality Party. For more information and to get involved, visit socialequality.com.

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