

Jerry White speaks at Quad Cities election meeting

Our reporters
31 May 2012

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for president, spoke at an election meeting at a coffee shop in downtown Rock Island, Illinois, Tuesday night.

This was the first SEP election meeting in the Quad Cities, which is located on the Iowa and Illinois banks of the Mississippi River. Supporters of the SEP campaigned for the meeting over the preceding weeks and spoke to many workers and youth who expressed sympathy for the SEP's election program.

The meeting was attended by about 15 students and workers from around the area. White's comments were followed by a question and answer period, and several attendees stayed afterwards for further discussion. In addition, a reporter for the Rock Island *Argus/Moline Dispatch*, the major newspaper for the Illinois Quad Cities, interviewed White for an article following the meeting.

In his report, White began by reviewing the fundamental issues upon which the two major candidates agree. "Both big business candidates—President Obama and his Republican challenger Mitt Romney—are committed to a program of savage austerity. Their already worked out plans involve historic cuts in Medicare, Medicaid and other essential programs that will drive millions more into destitution and magnify the level of social suffering that already exists.

"For the working class there are no fundamental differences. While millions voted for Obama in 2008 to end war, the attack on democratic rights and the decades-long growth of social inequality, on every score the Obama administration has not only continued the reactionary policies of his Republican predecessor, but has in fact gone much further."

White referred to Obama's Memorial Day speech, in

which the president went out of his way to rehabilitate and legitimize the Vietnam War. Obama proclaimed that the treatment of returning veterans was a "national shame" that would not be repeated: "You came home and sometimes were denigrated, when you should have been celebrated. It was a national shame, a disgrace that should have never happened. And that's why here today we resolve that it will not happen again."

In response, White stated, "According to President Obama it was not the criminal war which was a national shame. It was the mass protests against the war! In fact, it was not the anti-war protesters who provided returning soldiers with a miserable welcome but instead the US government, which spent decades blocking them from receiving medical benefits for Agent Orange, PTSD and other war related disabilities. After using the soldiers, they threw them overboard."

White said that the working class should take as a warning Obama's insistence that the "national shame" of anti-war protests would not be repeated. "Obama's argument has long been advanced by the most right-wing political forces, who insisted that the war was lost because disloyal protesters undermined the war effort and stabbed the country in the back. When the president resolves that 'this will never happen again,' he means that any future opposition to war and attacks on democratic rights will not be tolerated and will be met with violent repression."

White also explained the Obama administration's utilization of the economic crisis, caused by Wall Street speculation and financial parasitism, in order to ramp up attacks on workers' living standards. "High levels of unemployment are a deliberate policy sought by the administration, in order to drive down wages and facilitate attacks on healthcare and pensions." In illustration, White pointed to the bailout of the auto

industry, in which the Obama administration, with critical assistance from the United Auto Workers union, restored the profitability of the Big Three auto companies by decimating workers' benefits and by slashing the wages of all newly hired workers in half.

After the meeting, White answered questions about the SEP's attitude towards a wide range of important issues. Bradley, a cook, asked what the first step would be if the SEP were to gain power. White responded, "A radical redistribution of wealth is an absolute prerequisite to meet the needs of a modern society."

Although the SEP calls for an immediate, sharp increase in taxation on the very wealthy, and a sharp reduction in taxes for the working population, these measures in themselves are not socialist. In order to secure the basis for genuine social equality, White said, it will be necessary to nationalize the major banks and corporations and place the major resources of society under the democratic control of the working population. "When we say socialism, we don't mean the equal distribution of poverty. We mean creating such an abundance as to make poverty an anachronism."

Bradley also asked if the SEP believed it would be possible for a socialist government to coexist with other capitalist countries. White responded that the SEP bases itself on the internationalism found in the works of the best Marxist thinkers, above all Leon Trotsky. "The SEP doesn't have a national program. There are no more national solutions. Look at Greece. They can't solve their problems on their own. This internationalism—it's not a pipe dream," he added. "Capitalist corporations work internationally all the time. John Deere [headquartered in the Quad Cities] is transnational and operates on an international basis every day. American imperialism props up every oppressive government in the world. Once the working class begins to mobilize here, the support for it would be enormous. We actively reach out to our brothers and sisters in other countries."

Nick, a waiter and music instructor, asked what the SEP's attitude and policies were toward small and independent business owners. White explained, "When we talk about nationalizing the means of production, we don't mean the mom and pop shops, we mean the critical parts of the economy, the major banks and corporations." As opposed to the present situation, in

which the big banks are refusing to offer credit and many independent business owners are going bankrupt, a socialist government would provide funds and equipment to small businesses and poor farmers. At the same time, White stressed that a workers' state would seek to demonstrate the advantages and superiority of participating in more efficient large-scale production. "It's capitalism that's ruining small business owners right now, not socialism."

After the question and answer period, Brant, a student at Black Hawk Community College, described the meeting in enthusiastic terms. "White's speech was full of the detail and nuance I would expect from a candidate who is serious about his role in the fight against the capitalist nation-state system. It was very gratifying to hear someone provide such a concise political summary for the benefit of workers. I wish the discussion could have gone on even longer. I'd highly recommend future SEP meetings to anyone looking for an outlet to discuss the problems facing workers internationally, and for those looking for a way to educate and organize a party that will solve them."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact