

Socialist candidate Jerry White campaigns in southwest Detroit

Shannon Jones
7 May 2012

On Saturday Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White campaigned at the annual Cinco de Mayo celebration in southwest Detroit. The neighborhood, home to many Mexican immigrant workers, has, like others in the city, been devastated by the collapse of the auto industry.

In the late 1980s, General Motors, with the acquiescence of the United Auto Workers union, closed three factories that anchored the area. The shutdown of the Cadillac Assembly plant and two Fisher Body factories eliminating well over 10,000 auto and auto related jobs.

Residents of Detroit are facing the impact of massive cuts in jobs and services under terms being imposed by state officials in alliance with the local Democratic Party establishment. SEP campaigners urged workers to attend this Saturday's public meeting on the crisis in Detroit and the 2012 election (See here for details).

Workers and young people warmly greeted the socialist candidate. Many stopped to discuss the policies of the SEP, telling White about the difficult conditions they face and their growing disillusionment with the Democrats and Republicans.

Julia Martinez, a young worker, spoke about her situation. "I work at Family Dollar unloading trucks and stocking shelves. My husband works midnight shift and makes \$12.50 an hour. But with our bills, our rent, light gas and water, we still don't make enough."

Gabriel, a Detroit City worker, has worked five years for the water department. He spoke about the massive cuts in jobs and city services being proposed by the Democratic administration of Detroit Mayor David Bing. "I have worked for the city for 14 years. They are all in bed with each other and the citizens don't know. The citizens feel a little beaten down, like they really don't have any options. It is like you are saying, 'do you want to be killed with a knife or a gun?'"

Miguel Arzola, age 24, who lives in the Detroit suburb of Roseville, is a young construction worker. "It is seasonal work," said Miguel. "I get paid around \$23 an hour, but you only work seven months out of the year. And during the wintertime you have to survive off of that. Unemployment doesn't pay you anything. If you do a little cash work, if you report that, they take your unemployment away."

He spoke about the various job schemes offered to young people. "There are a lot of scams. The trucking industry is an example. They offer to pay for your schooling and they train you. But they pay you on salary for about two months. So right there they are getting easy money. Once you start working they pay you 25 cents a mile, which is nothing. You have to drive over 3,000 miles a week to get over \$600. It's not worth it.

"I have student loans to pay. I didn't even finish school because I was paying for it myself. Originally I was going to go to (the University of) Connecticut, but it was too expensive, so I stayed here and I went to Baker College, which I believe is a scam. They say 99 percent of their graduates get a job, but what kind of jobs? They are in the service industry that are only going to pay you \$7 an hour and it maxes out at \$14.

"The future doesn't look great. I know I won't have Social Security when I retire.

"There is definitely going to be a movement. It is happening in Spain. It happened in Egypt as well. It is mostly young people that are starting it. I would say definitely in my lifetime it might happen."

Miguel told White, "I don't agree with Obama's policies, but the unions, they push you to vote for him. I am not good on politics, I consider myself a libertarian.

White explained that while Ron Paul, the libertarian candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, represents himself as an outsider, his politics are free market. "He wants to get rid of minimum wages. He

wants to get rid of child labor laws. He wants to get rid of social security. He says this is all an impossible burden on the free market. His outlook is the outlook of a small businessman. But it is a politics that the rich drool over. They want to turn the clock back to the 19th century.”

Miguel said he was very interested in finding out more about the policies of the Socialist Equality Party. He bought a copy of the SEP program and made a donation to support White’s campaign.

Dave, an electrical engineer, said his father had worked 30 years in the auto plants. “The unions capitulated because they knew they weren’t going to have any jobs. They said give back concessions or you won’t have a job, so it had to be that way.”

White replied, “The concessions did not save a single job. The United Auto Workers was telling workers that the enemy was a Japanese worker or a Mexican worker and that we had to make our companies more competitive. Now, the UAW is boasting that GM is closing factories in Mexico and China and moving jobs back to America for cheaper labor here. Obama is calling it insourcing.

“We’re saying that the working class all over the world has the same interest. We shouldn’t compete against each other to see who can work for the cheapest wages. We shouldn’t kill each other in another war to see which banks and oil companies are going to dominate the world.”

Dave agreed. “It is a war machine, that’s for sure. Eisenhower warned about it. All the defense industry stocks took a huge dip right as Obama was elected. But then they went right back up when he said ‘business as usual’. They thought everything was going to change with the wars, but it didn’t. Now he’s talking 10 more years in Afghanistan.

Marie Caruso, a Ford retiree, said, “They are saying that we at the Big Three make too much. Excuse me, we created the middle class. I pay federal and state taxes. I pay a lot.”

Drawing a diagram on the ground, White explained that while the working class created the wealth of society, the rich controlled the vast bulk of that wealth. “You are not paid for what you do,” said White. “You are only paid a small fraction. And they want us fighting among ourselves for that small fraction.”

White explained that the SEP was fighting for a socialist alternative to the failed capitalist system, in which the wealth created by the working people throughout the world would be utilized to meet human needs, not private profit.

Wardell Montgomery, a retired worker, said, “Someone said we got more cuts in two years under Obama than in eight years under Bush. They use Obama the same way they used Colin Powell; people who are respected—blacks, minorities. They are thinking of him as a liberal progressive. But he is a conservative at best.”

Jerry White: “That is the nature of capitalism itself. American capitalism has been in decline for 30 years. They have no intention to make the slightest concessions or social reforms. They want to destroy everything that has been carried out before. Obama has already agreed with the Republicans to cut hundreds of billions from Medicare.

“Racial politics has been going on a long time. Richard Nixon was the one who proposed black capitalism. Bing is a multi-millionaire. He got it from minority set-asides. And he hates the working class, black and white. The issue is one of class.”

Wardell asked White his opinion of the politics of the Green Party.

White replied, “The Green Party is a capitalist party. They say that if somehow you can appeal to the conscience of the powers that be, we can find the reasonable capitalist to make society more ecological. Where the Greens have come to power, far from fighting big business, they have done the direct service of the rich. In Germany the Greens are in coalition governments. In Berlin they slashed social benefits left and right. They supported the first German military operation outside of the country since World War II, backing the war in the Balkans in 1999. They say the problem isn’t capitalism. They say the problem is the development of technology itself. That’s not the problem. The problem is the irrational use of this technology under capitalism.

“Under socialism,” White said, “the productive and natural resources of humanity could be utilized in a rational fashion to both protect the environment and put an end to poverty and inequality.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact