

“The banks don’t want human beings, they want indentured servants”

Jerry White talks to Montreal students and workers

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On the eve of a public meeting in Montreal, Socialist Equality Party US presidential candidate Jerry White campaigned among workers and youth. They spoke to White about the Quebec student strike and the broader social conditions that people in the province face.

Lan Sinha spoke on the issues of education, the student strike and Bill 78, the anti-democratic ruling targeting protests. “I think education is a social right, and it should be free. I payed a fair amount for CEGEP [a two year pre-university education], and any more would have been too much. Some people argue that in Quebec, the tuition is lower than in any other part of Canada, but tuition shouldn't go up just because of that.”

“There is also growing debt. It's not nearly as bad as in the United States, where it's in the tens of thousands but it's there and growing, nonetheless. Because of this, I'm really glad that the strike is happening. We need action now rather than waiting around for the government to impose more fees on us. That it's gone on for so long means there is hope and determination in the students.”

“I'm also very upset about Bill 78. It very much impinges on our social rights. The whole point of living in Canada is because its supposed to be a democracy.”

Lan then asked what White thought about Bill 78. White responded, “There are attacks on the working class internationally. Bill 78 is a part of that. Look at events in Chicago and Egypt and Greece. All across the world, governments are inflicting massive repression in response to the working class rising up and challenging the bourgeoisie.”

Afterward, Lan thanked White for making him think about these issues.

Eric Lamothe, a 33-year-old professional musician, discussed his ideas on what would be needed to rebuild society. “We need a lot of people who know how to build. We can't solve problems by finding ways to make more profit. We need people. Everything is built on knowledge, and we need more of that.”

White responded by stressing the necessity for politics. “What is fundamentally necessary is a political leadership to fight for the working class, and a fight against the dictatorship of the banks.”

Eric agreed with the point on the banks, saying, “We're all under the control of the banks. The first step of the government against us has always been to attack culture and education, and then they do their best to take away natural resources and destroy them, like they are doing in Northern Quebec. It's because we all are in debt to the banks, including the government, and so they do whatever they want.”

White expanded on this point, “The governments are in the debt of the banks, but they are also the instruments of the banks, and inflict mass austerity on the working class to pay for the economic crisis while letting the banks hoard huge sums of money.”

Christophe Gauthier is a student involved in the Quebec student strike who is helping to organize a concert in opposition to Bill 78.

“We're holding this concert against Bill 78,” explained Christophe. “It will be performed by sixty

student musicians, all whom have participated in the strike. It's entitled Requiem for Democracy because we feel that Bill 78 is the destruction of our democratic rights in Quebec. We want to challenge that.”

He also commented on the strike in general. “I'm glad that the strike has gone on for as long as it has. It's impressive for its size and breadth, and we have to continue the strike come August. There will be a lot of opposition from the university officials and violence from the police and security forces, but we have to stay strong.”

Julie Robitaille, a teacher in Montreal, spoke extensively on debt, the right to an education and democratic rights.

“My boyfriend just graduated from a university in the United States and has \$60,000 in debt. Even with a decent job, he's never going to be paying that off. I just graduated from University of Quebec at Montreal (UQAM), and I'm \$12,000 in debt. It's more reasonable, especially since I have a concrete job, but that's a rare thing. I'm lucky in that regard, in contrast to most people with a bachelor's degree who can't get a job.”

“Even with my job, paying off debts is still hard. There is a certain amount of help from the government, but with a job like mine, where the maximum salary is \$39,000 and the starting salary is much less, paying off debt is trying. The banks don't want human beings, they want indentured servants.”

White discussed how conditions are similar in the US. “In the United States, charter schools are being used to privatize education. These are schools that receive public funds but are privately owned. They working conditions are terrible, with teachers having to teach classes of 40 students in some cases. In addition, the schools are in constant competition with each other so that they aren't closed down by the Obama administration.”

Julie talked about similarities in the British system. “I worked in the UK for a bit, and education was also bad there. I met 7-year-olds who couldn't read. It was really disheartening. Education, a good education, should be a social right. You shouldn't be forced to go to university to get a job just so you can pay back the banks. You should study because you want to study, you want to learn about the world and raise human culture.”

“This shows one of the many ways that democracy is

being undermined,” said White, exploring the topic more. “In the US, the election campaigns of Obama and Romney will total three billion dollars. Both politicians are beholden to the banks and will make sure that their interests are defended through attacks on the working class in the form of even more austerity measures.”

“It's like that all over the world,” said Julie.

Julie then asked what the political content of the meeting would be about.

“It will be about building a political leadership for the student strike and the struggles of the working class”, responded White. The SEP seeks to build a political movement of the working class to challenge the banks. This means fighting for a program and perspective that isn't just focused on Quebec, but on the international situation as a whole, that sees the struggles of students here as part of the struggle against capitalism. This meeting will be discussing this and expanding on these ideas to build the leadership of the working class in Quebec, Canada and internationally.”

For details on the Montreal meeting, [click here](#).



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