

SEP candidate Jerry White holds “meet and greet” in Detroit

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16 June 2012

Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White participated in a “meet and greet” event at the monthly meeting of the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs in northwest Detroit Thursday evening.

The gathering was attended by a cross-section of working people in Detroit including, auto workers, teachers, musicians and retirees.

Lawrence Porter, chairman of the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs, made the opening remarks. He referred to the massive austerity measures imposed in Greece. He noted that the attacks being carried out on the working class in Detroit under terms of the recently signed consent agreement between the Democratic city administration and Michigan Republican Governor Rick Snyder differed only in terms of scale.

Porter then introduced Jerry White, who explained the basis of the SEP intervention in the 2012 elections.

White said, “My running mate Phyllis Scherrer and I have emphasized that this campaign is aimed at politically preparing the working class for the type of explosive social struggles that are on the horizon. Regardless of whether Obama or Romney wins the election, they are thoroughly beholden to the banks and corporate interests that are seeking to impoverish the working class to make us pay for the crisis of the capitalist system.”

White said the SEP rejects the claim that there is no money for a decent standard of living or social services. He noted that the auto industry last year posted record profits after slashing the wages of young workers by 50 percent and wiping out tens of thousands of jobs.

Despite these profits, said White, the working class

was being condemned to increasing misery and poverty.

He pointed to Obama’s recent speech on the economy in Cleveland, where Obama attacked Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney for advocating tax cuts, budget cuts and deregulation. “Well that is exactly what Obama has done in three years in office.

“Workers are now being returned to the conditions of our fathers and grandfathers—enormous exploitation, poverty wages. The trade unions, which workers built to resist these conditions, now share in corporate ownership. They tell workers who complain, ‘shut up, be happy you have a job.’”

White explained that the SEP rejected the identity politics advanced by groups such as By Any Means Necessary (BAMN). Such groups represent the interests of a narrow layer of upper middle class African Americans, allied with the Democratic Party, that doesn’t want to change the system, but wants to get into the system.

“Workers—whether black, white, immigrant, native born—have to advance our own solution to this crisis,” said White. “The banks and basic industry have to be taken out of the hands of the billionaires. We have to reorganize society democratically and rationally so that the wealth created by our class is utilized to meet social needs. There is plenty of wealth. The question is who controls that wealth and how that wealth is utilized.”

In conclusion, White called on those present to become involved in the campaign and help to build the SEP.

During the discussion that followed White’s talk, Andre, a worker at Chrysler, asked if the auto industry could be retooled to help in building a light rail system

and other forms of mass transportation. “Would the elite be against something like that? A light rail system could be built now by transferring resources.”

Jerry White responded, “It is a perfectly rational proposal. The human resources are there. The technology is available. The question is, why do the most rational solutions never get carried out? The capitalist system doesn’t work on the basis of a rational allocation of resources. It is based on extracting profit from the unpaid labor of the working class.”

The rational reorganization of the auto industry under capitalism is not possible, continued White. “It requires that the auto industry be put under the control of the working class to meet human need, not profit.”

Barry Grey, the US editor of the *World Socialist Web Site*, noted that when the United States entered World War II, overnight the auto industry was transformed for war production because that was in the interest of the US ruling elite.

“You have to have a workers government,” continued Grey. “A government of, by, and for the working class. The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to build a mass political party of the working class that will fight for political power to carry out socialist policies in the interests of the working class.”

Audrey, who works with autistic children in the Detroit Public Schools, described the conditions she and her coworkers now face with the ongoing cuts to public education. “When I started full time, we were making \$14.51 per hour. In the last two years with the cuts we have gone down to \$13.79, and it is slowly going down. Now you have to re-interview for the same job you were hired for in the first place. That is crazy.”

A retired worker then asked how what was taking place in the Detroit schools related to banking and finance.

White responded, “The right to public education is something the working class had to fight and die for. The establishment of public schools implied taking some of the wealth of the ruling class and using it for social needs.” White explained that over the past 30 years there had been an assault on the right to public education, which the ruling class more and more views as an intolerable drain on profits. This has been

accompanied by attacks on the wages and benefits of teachers and the spread of for-profit charter schools under the guise of so-called “school reform.”

He explained that far from resisting this, the unions have said, “Do school reform with us, not against us.” The teachers unions, said White, “are saying we have no problem with school reform, just allow us to be part of the attacks on teachers.”

Following the meeting, Andre said, “I think Jerry White is right on point. I think a lot of what he is talking about needs to be done. It would be interesting to see him in a debate with the other candidates. I know it will be an uphill battle.

“We need to focus on class issues. They had a black focus, and that didn’t work. Since I have been living in Detroit we have had black mayors and there has been no difference. It seems like all of the movements of the sixties, like the Black Panthers, became part of the system. Greed is greed. It doesn’t matter what color you are.”



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