

New York City workers discuss American militarism and Obama's role in drone attacks

An SEP campaign team
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On Saturday, supporters of the Socialist Equality Party's presidential candidate, Jerry White, campaigned in East Flatbush, a working-class neighborhood of Brooklyn. They distributed leaflets that analyzed the significance of the role of President Obama in personally selecting targets for assassination by pilotless drone aircraft in Pakistan and Yemen. Later this month, White will be giving a meeting in New York City on the topic of "Obama, drones and the crisis of American democracy."

East Flatbush is a neighborhood of just under four square miles in area with a population of approximately 80,000 inhabitants. The median household income in 2008 was about \$43,000 a year. The poverty rate is over 20 percent. Many of the workers who live there are of Caribbean descent, including recent immigrants and naturalized citizens from Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, as well as most of the smaller islands in the region.

Most workers whom the campaigners spoke to had not heard about the President's "Terror Tuesdays" and his personal involvement in selecting those who would be killed in remote drone attacks, including the one that killed Anwar al-Awlaki, the New Mexico-born Muslim preacher and US citizen and his 17 year-old son in Yemen last year. Many took the leaflet and said they would read it. Others were shocked to learn about the position of the Obama administration on those issues.

Few workers supported the wars and killings, which the government has justified with the invocation of a "war on terror", and nearly everyone the campaigners encountered was deeply dissatisfied with social issues such as mass unemployment and budget cuts.

One example of this contradictory concern for the

deteriorating conditions of life combined with a residual support of Obama was put forward by Lisa Goodrich, who said, "I don't agree with all the cuts. I'm a social worker, so the underserved are the people who I am concerned with. Who are they cutting? People on welfare."

But when asked what she thought of Obama's direct involvement in choosing drone-bombing targets, Lisa said. "We can't agree with everything that he is doing, but what will happen if the Republicans come back? That is what I am afraid of."

Others were well aware of Obama's role and registered their disgust. William Griffin, a registered nurse, said of Obama's role in drone attacks, "The so called 'war on terror' is immoral and unconstitutional. The illusion that the drones don't kill civilians is just that--an illusion.

"It is a shame that the first African-American president is carrying out actions that Martin Luther King would find abhorrent and repulsive.

"This 'war on terror' is the flag that they are raising. But the real reasons for their military actions are the rare earth minerals in Afghanistan, encircling China, and control of oil."

A similar sentiment came from a young woman who did not want her name used because she is an active-duty soldier.

"Obama should be impeached and removed from the White House. The National Defense Authorization Act gives him the right to arrest everyone.

"I joined the army after what happened on 9/11, but then I found out that 9/11 was an inside job.

"We go into the Middle East for the oil. They remove a government that they don't like, replace it with a government friendly to them in order to deplete the

country's resources. When we went into Iraq, we found no weapons of mass destruction.

"The same people that support Obama support Romney. They talk different from each other, but they represent the same thing."

Booz Celestine, a worker of Haitian descent, works in what he described as multilevel marketing. "The drone attacks are despicable," he said. "Obama picks out who he wants to kill. It is like a game to him."

"I was a full-time intern for Obama for four months in 2008 in Florida. My position has changed. I do not support the Democrats or the Republicans."

Booz told campaigners that he had been reading the *World Socialist Web Site* since 2008. "It has changed my mind about a lot of things. I like David Walsh's film reviews. I want to be a filmmaker, but as a result of reading the website, I have changed my mind about the topics I would like to do. For example, I would like to make a film about what is going on now in Europe."

Carmelle Joseph, a housewife, said of the drone assassinations: "I feel Obama is wrong. Why do they have to kill these people with drone attacks? How can you actually determine what people are doing? The administration and the military probably say that someone is a terrorist because they want to kill them in the first place. We have to speak up and criticize this."

Randy Williams, who is looking for a job, said, "Obama is not supposed to be doing that. If he shouldn't be doing that, he shouldn't be president. I thought Obama was doing good."

"Some people should talk to Obama. Maybe he doesn't really know what he is doing. Someone should ask why he is choosing people to be killed with drone attacks. Someone should tell him not to kill people who think they are doing the right thing for their people."

An SEP campaigner pointed out that entire political establishment supports drone attacks and openly expresses admiration for Obama's personal role in selecting victims. Only on the basis of the independent mobilization of the working class, the campaigner argued, could democratic rights be defended.



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