

Jerry White campaigns at Wayne State University in Detroit

David Brown
7 June 2012

On Wednesday, Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US president, spoke with students and workers at Wayne State University in Detroit. Wayne State serves 32,000 students in the heart of Detroit and is surrounded by economic devastation.

The International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) have a chapter at Wayne State and were supporting White's campaign by passing out leaflets on the Quebec student strike and Obama's program of drone assassinations.

White engaged several people in discussions that centered on the need for the working class to build a socialist alternative to the two big business parties. Leroy Murray, a criminal justice student who stopped by the campaign table, expressed concern over the health care system and class inequality.

"A lot of people I know have been getting sick, and they don't feel like anyone cares," Leroy said. "It seems like every night an ambulance goes down my street. I don't think the government would allow this wave of sickness to happen except it's happening to minorities and poor people.

"For the first time I really needed health care and there's all these hoops to jump through. They treat you like pariahs. I think we need to get young people out speaking about this. It's not really a race issue—it's a class issue. It's happening to all poor people."

White spoke about the Socialist Equality Party's campaign, demanding that health care be a social right. "Whether you live or die should not be determined by your income. If anyone is going to defend workers' right to healthcare it's going to be us, the working class itself."

"Exactly," Leroy responded. "What do you think we should be doing as . . . the working class. I was going to say minorities, but you're right, it's the working

class."

"The first thing," White answered, "is to build a political leadership of the working class. I emphasize the working class because it includes all races and nationalities. The building of a such a party requires a fight against racial politics, which has long been used to divide the working class."

White explained that after the social upheavals of the 1960s, including the urban rebellion in Detroit in 1967, the corporate and political establishment, aided by various middle class proponents of identity politics, claimed that the election of black Democrats—like Detroit's mayor Coleman Young—would end inequality, poverty and police brutality.

In the end, however, the African American political and business elites defended the capitalist system just as brutally as their white counterparts. The final outcome of identity politics, White said, was the promotion of Barack Obama who has not only continued the anti-working class and militarist policies of his Republican predecessor but escalated them.

Leroy said he wasn't sure whether he would be able to attend Wayne State next year because of high tuition and the large amount of student debt he owed. He said he was very interested in joining the ISSE and supporting the election campaign.

White also spoke to Jay Hayes, who owns a small landscaping business. After White explained his opposition to both Obama and Romney, Hayes said, "You've got two parties that you have to find a mean between. Unless you want to spark a revolutionary war. Any president has to work between them."

White explained that the official presentation of political life in America, as one of a bitter conflict between the Democrats and Republicans, concealed the fact that both of these parties, whatever the tactical

differences, defended the wealth and power of the corporate and financial elite. “The debate between the Democrats and the Republicans excludes the interests of the vast majority of people. They both start from the defense of corporate profits. Take the bailout of General Motors for example. Obama came in, shredded the wages and conditions of auto workers in order to boost the profits of the corporations and Wall Street.”

Hayes asked, “But when Obama bailed out GM, autoworkers were already going to lose their jobs, so what would have happened if Obama hadn’t intervened?”

White explained that the collapse of the auto industry was the direct result of the 2008 financial crash on Wall Street. While Obama bailed out the banks with no strings attached, the loans to GM and Chrysler were conditions on vicious wage and benefit cuts for auto workers. “None of the financial criminals responsible for the worst economic crisis since the 1930s were forced to take a 50 percent pay cut like auto workers,” White said. “When Obama bailed out the auto industry it was to protect that private profit and not the jobs of the workers.”

The SEP candidate said the working class had to nationalize the banks and big corporations so that the wealth produced by workers could be used to guarantee secure jobs and decent living standards, not the further enrichment of the CEOs and big investors.

“I hear what you’re saying,” Hayes said, “and I agree that the workers need that money more than the rich, but as a small business owner, I couldn’t see myself just handing over my business if I built it up.”

White explained the SEP was not for nationalizing small businesses, which themselves were starved of credit and being bankrupted by the big banks. Moreover, he said, vast sums were being monopolized by hedge fund managers and other financial who made their money, not by actually producing anything but essentially by looting society. After handing Wall Street some \$23 trillion, both the Democrats and Republicans are now saying there is no money for jobs, decent wages or to fund public education.

Hayes agreed and added, “the cost of living keeps rising and wages aren’t keeping pace. You have to look at what effects that has on society. Like how they keep cutting education. But if it’s doomed, how come these people in power don’t change it? Don’t they see what

they’re doing?”

Jerry then drew the connection to the American Civil War. “With the American slavocracy, it was a doomed system but the slave owners weren’t willing to just give up the slaves which were their source of wealth. When Lincoln was elected they didn’t say ‘The people have spoken, we better abide by their will.’ No, they started a civil war to defend slavery and it took a revolution to end slavery.”

“It’s going to take a bigger revolution now,” Hayes said. “It’s going to take a world revolution.”



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