

SEP campaigners in Michigan discuss Obama's drone assassinations

A WSWWS reporting team
4 June 2012

Over the weekend, campaigners for the Socialist Equality Party spoke to workers and students in Ypsilanti and Detroit, Michigan about Jerry White's campaign for president, and Obama's role in ordering drone strikes.

The campaign teams handed out articles on Obama's "kill list" and the initial campaign statement of Jerry White. They spoke of the need for the working class to build a socialist party to oppose the international push for war and austerity.

In Ypsilanti, an industrial town 35 miles west of Detroit, campaigners spoke with Morgan, a medical worker, about the program of assassinations directly supervised and organized from the White House by President Obama.

"It bothered me," she began by saying. "The drone strikes started with Bush, but then Obama increased them. I was just listening to reports about them on the way over here."

She talked with the campaign team about the defense appropriations bill, which Obama signed into law last year authorizing the deployment of 30,000 drones in the skies over American cities within the next decade.

"That is the thing I don't understand," she said. "Who are we being invaded by? I know they know something they are not telling us."

"I wish they had never invented Homeland Security. What do you need another FBI or CIA for? It has to be that they are watching our own citizens. Just like the cameras on the streets in New York and other cities, how much of our rights do we have to give up to be secure?"

"They are afraid of a national citizens revolt—an Arab Spring in the United States. But it will be much worse when it comes here. That would just terrify them."

The exchange with campaigners then progressed to

questions about Obama's wage cutting in the auto industry and drastic budget cuts in the local school systems and municipal governments. At a recent meeting of the Ypsilanti city council, the mayor outlined a program of layoffs and draconian cuts in services in the city, which is home to Eastern Michigan University. The campaigners explained the strategy of both parties to postpone planned cuts in Social Security and Medicare until after the elections.

"The government was never meant to put our young people and seniors into desperate poverty," Morgan added. "I work in a nursing home, and it is heartbreaking—the conditions that seniors have to deal with."

"It is no longer just racial discrimination. It is class discrimination. It is like your vote doesn't count. I hate saying that because we have to take political action to change anything."

Campaigners talked about the Socialist Equality Party election campaign and the upcoming public meeting being sponsored by the SEP in the area, as well as the hostility of the media and political establishment toward a campaign that was fighting to mobilize the working class in defense of its democratic and social rights.

She concurred saying, "It is always the Democrats and Republicans working together. They will not let any other party or opinion come into focus."

"We have a multitude of people, but their voices do not get heard. I have never understood how they can do that. That truly bothers me. The masses need a voice. They need a leadership they can trust."

Morgan then said, "One of my greatest fears is that I do not want to go into what they have in China, or what they had in the USSR. I fear having checkpoints

between different parts of the city with police standing guard to verify where you are going and watch what you are doing.”

The campaign team then discussed with her the history of Trotskyism, which represented the socialist alternative to the Stalinist regimes she was describing, and encouraged her to begin reading the *World Socialist Web Site* and to attend the upcoming meeting in Ypsilanti where Jerry White, the SEP candidate for president, will be speaking.

In Detroit, campaigners leafleted outside Eastern Market, the produce market near downtown. They spoke about the wars, elections, and budget cuts with Leo Rybinski, a bartender training to become a millwright, and Alicia Edwards who works in a stable.

Expressing doubts in the political system Leo said “It seems like with any party they’re just in it for themselves. It’s like they’re running their own business. That’s why I haven’t been paying much attention to politics. I’m against the war but I don’t know much about it.”

Campaigners explained how the Socialist Equality Party was a party of the working class and how that distinguished it from the parties of the financial elite like the Democrats and Republicans. When the topic turned to the local budget cuts in Michigan, Alicia spoke about the transportation and school systems.

“The bus cuts have really been affecting me in a bad way. I commute out to Bloomfield Hills and it requires transfers. So when a bus doesn’t come it’s a real problem. Sometimes I don’t get home until after 7. Also I grew up in Royal Oak and they closed lots of schools.” Between 2006 and 2009, Royal Oak closed down one high school, a middle school, and four elementary schools, as a response to budget cuts and declining enrollment.

Throughout the day many people expressed their dislike of the wars and their uncertainty about how to effectively oppose them. For many people, speaking with the campaign team was the first time that they heard about Obama’s personal role in the drone attacks.

Common responses were like those of Charles Spence, who said, “I think the war’s stupid. I don’t think anyone should go to war. They’re just using the war to make money.” When asked about the elections, Charles said that he’d only just started paying attention

to them.

Similarly, a young woman told campaigners, “The wars are ridiculous, but I try to not know too much about them, because I don’t know what I can do. I was too young to vote in the last election and I don’t think I’m going to vote in this one because I honestly don’t think it really counts.”

The campaign team discussed the Socialist Equality Party campaign and how its candidates were running not simply to get votes, but to organize workers and students outside the capitalist parties.

The general mood of workers was opposition to the policies of the Democrats and Republicans without knowing what an alternative could be. In a moment symbolic of the deep-seated disappointment with the Democrats, a seven-year-old boy approached the campaign team, and told them, “People are just excited about Obama because he’s the first black president, but he doesn’t do anything.”

All of this points to the objective importance of the Socialist Equality Party’s campaign. Workers and youth are looking for alternatives to the establishment parties, and only the SEP is fighting for the political independence of the working class.



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