

SEP (US) presidential candidate speaks at Berlin Humboldt University

Our correspondents
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On Saturday, Jerry White, presidential candidate of the Socialist Equality Party in the US, addressed an audience of 170 at the historic Humboldt University in Berlin. The meeting was marked by the intense attention paid by the audience to White's report and the subsequent session of questions and answers.

White was on the third leg of his international tour, having spoken at a succession of meetings in Sri Lanka and Great Britain in previous weeks. Following his trip to Berlin, White returns to the US for the final seven weeks of the campaign before the November 6 election.

White began his speech by recalling his last visit to Berlin in October 2008, just a month after the collapse of Lehman Brothers and a month before the election of Barack Obama. Expressing the broad illusions in Obama at that time, a crowd of around 200,000 had gathered to hear the Democratic candidate speak at the Victory Column in Berlin.

Since then both the working populations of Europe and the US have undergone strategic experiences. White pointed that the "levels of unemployment and social misery in Europe had reached levels not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Eighteen million Europeans are out of work as well as more than half of all young people in Spain and Greece. The universal demand raised by the ECB [European Central Bank] and the global banks was austerity and so-called labor market 'reform,' i.e., the destruction of any semblance of job security or livable income."

White noted that these measures are aimed not only at the workers of Greece, but workers in Germany as well. "Germany's dependence on exports makes it extremely vulnerable to the global recession, and this will inevitably bring more attacks on incomes and jobs and an expansion of the already huge low-wage sector."

White declared that such attacks were incompatible with democratic forms of rule, drawing attention to the police murder of 37 striking platinum miners in South Africa. "The same tendencies were emerging in every country," he noted. "The ruling class knows that its deeply unpopular policies cannot be imposed peacefully."

"That was the meaning of the high court decision in Germany last month approving the deployment of the army within the country—a measure that expands the emergency laws first put in place in May 1968 when neighboring France was on the brink of revolution and a student revolution, and unrest in the factories was widespread. The legal basis for military deployment is so vague it could easily be used to justify political dissent and working class opposition."

White continued by reviewing the recent convention of the US Democratic Party that nominated Obama. White commented on the complete hypocrisy of the content and workings of the convention, which

"exemplified the enormous chasm between ordinary workers and the bought-and-paid-for politicians. Gathering with the party's corporate and media backers behind barricades and protected from protesters by thousands of police, the Democrats postured as critics of Wall Street and the Republicans, and champions of the so-called middle class.

"In his acceptance speech, Obama attempted to posture as Franklin Roosevelt, the Democratic president in the 1930s who, fearing social revolution, introduced certain social reforms, including the government hiring of millions of unemployed workers. At the same time, he sent a signal to Wall Street to make clear he had not the slightest intention of implementing social programs to create jobs or alleviate the social distress spreading across the country. 'And by the way,' he said, 'those of us who carry on his [Roosevelt's] party's legacy should remember that not every problem can be remedied with another government program or dictate from Washington.'

"Later on, Obama made a point of reiterating his obligatory homage to capitalism, declaring: 'We honor the strivers, the dreamers, the risk-takers, the entrepreneurs who have always been the driving force behind our free enterprise system, the greatest engine of growth and prosperity the world has ever known.'

"This in a country," White continued, "where tens of millions have lost their jobs, homes and livelihoods over the last three years while the only ones who have experienced 'growth and prosperity' are the corporate and financial aristocracy. After handing over trillions for the bailout of the Wall Street banks and vast expansion of American military machine, whatever their tactical differences, both parties insist even the meager social safety in the US is no longer affordable.

"Behind the backs of the American people both parties—whether Obama or Romney wins—have already agreed to destroy whatever is left of the social protections won by the working class over the course of the past two centuries. If Roosevelt called the social reforms he was forced by the working class to grant in the 1930s his New Deal, one would have to characterize the programs of both Obama and Romney as the anti-New Deal.

"Under conditions where it is evident that social polarization in the US has enormously intensified under Obama, his re-election is being promoted by middle class pseudo-left organizations who defend the unions and promote racial politics to keep the working class tied to the Democrats."

White referred to a recent article by two former Maoists, entitled "The 2012 Elections Have Little To Do With Obama's Record ... Which Is Why We Are Voting For Him."

They argue that at the heart of the social polarization in the US today are the issues of race and women's oppression. They write: "Unfortunately what too few leftists and progressives have been prepared to accept is that the polarization is to a great extent centered on a revenge-seeking white supremacy; on race and the racial implications of the moves to the right in the US political system. It is also focused on a re-subjugation of women,

harsh burdens on youth and the elderly, increased war dangers, and reaction all along the line for labor and the working class. No one on the left with any good sense should remain indifferent or stand idly by in the critical need to defeat Republicans this year...”

White declared that “Racial politics was the program of the American bourgeoisie when it abandoned social reform and cultivated, under the name of black capitalism and Affirmative Action, an upper middle class and bourgeoisie among African Americans, Hispanics, women and gays.”

Obama, with his multi-culturalist background—a Muslim Kenyan father and white mother; raised in Indonesia—was appointed with the job of repackaging of US imperialism.

“This is what lay behind the support given to ‘human rights’ imperialism by a host of middle class pseudo-left professors, former anti-war activists, and women and gay activists, who have made their peace with US and European imperialism. This includes pseudo-left organizations like the British SWP, the French New Anti-Capitalist Party, the International Socialist Organization and the NSSP here, which have hailed the CIA-backed ‘rebels’ in Libya and Syria as revolutionaries and sanctioned the neo-colonial proxy wars.

“Events in South Africa have further exposed that the central issue is not race, but class. There is a class chasm between Marxism and the politics of the pseudo-lefts.”

White concluded by noting that the building of a revolutionary party in the US has proven to be a protracted process. “In so far as a sufficient portion of national income had gone to the working class and the post-war economic boom allowed each generation to do better than the last, workers saw no need for socialism. In the final analysis it was the economic strength of American capitalism that kept the working class subordinated to the capitalist Democratic Party and the politics of upper-middle-class liberalism.

“The conditions have fundamentally changed—and this is leading to a profound change in political consciousness and a shift to the left by the working class. We are on the eve of the most immense eruption of the class struggle in the US, as part of an international upheaval unparalleled in historical experience.”

Jerry White’s remarks were warmly applauded by the audience, a number of whom then posed a series of questions.

One American student declared that she had run up debts of \$50,000 in the course of her studies so far, and in order to find some sort of work was planning to take a further degree course that would cost her another \$30,000. She asked White how the SEP would tackle this problem.

On this issue, White referred to what the SEP calls the “student loan racket.” He pointed out that the sum of outstanding student loans now totaled \$1 trillion and was the new realm of speculation for the financial crooks behind the housing loan scam and banking collapse of 2008.

“The issue of a decent education as a right is coming up all over the world,” he said. “There have been demonstrations and protests in Mexico, Chile, Britain and most recently in Quebec, Canada. Our policy is for the cancellation of all student loans and establishing the basis for everyone all over the planet to have a good and free education. That can only be done in the struggle to abolish the capitalist system based on private profit and nation states.”

Other participants asked Jerry White his opinion of the Green candidate in the presidential election, Jill Stein, and the SEP’s views on the political evolution of the Occupy movement.

The discussion continued after the meeting, and WSWs reporters spoke with a number of participants. A flight attendant based in Berlin who had been on strike last week came up to Jerry White at the end of the meeting for further discussion. The flight attendant came to the meeting after receiving a PSG strike leaflet advertising the meeting during last week’s strike. He explained that he agreed in particular with the necessity for an international political perspective:

“My general philosophy is a world without borders—the establishment of a sort of worldwide network. I was able to vote in the last US election and voted for Obama, but realise that both the Republicans and the Democrats are beholden to the money markets. In the state where I vote, the Democrats always get in anyway, so in previous elections I have also voted for third candidates.

“I was especially interested to hear an independent candidate for the US presidency speak and what was said about the need for the construction of organizations independent of the trade unions. I am a member of the UFO flight attendants union, which I regard as a step towards organizing independently of the big unions. I am quite aware of the shabby role played by the German Verdi public service union, which opposed the last strike by ground crews. The old UFO leaders were also prepared to collaborate with management and were replaced by a new leadership.”

When it was pointed out that UFO represented an organizational break with big unions such as Verdi, but nevertheless shared the same basic nationalist orientation, he conceded that this was certainly in conflict with his basic international perspective. “I am well aware of the lousy role played by the US unions such as the UAW at GM,” he said.

Joe, an unemployed musician from the United States, admitted that he had formerly paid little attention to socialist politics, but felt he had no representation from the two major parties in the US election. “I see that they only fight for votes and have nothing in common with the interests of working people,” he said. Joe thought that Jerry White’s depiction of the situation was “very good” and said he had resolved to read the *World Socialist Web Site* on a regular basis and undertake an intensive study of socialist politics.

Khalil, a Tunisian student, agreed “completely” with Jerry’s remarks, saying he had personally been politicized by the events in his homeland in 2011. He was concerned about exposing himself politically, however, because after the threat of expulsion made to foreign students in London he feared a similar development in Germany.

A member of the German Left Party, who wanted to remain anonymous, said he was very much in agreement with Jerry White’s lecture: “This was the second PSG meeting I have attended and I fully agree with your analysis.”



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