

SEP candidate Jerry White speaks to transit workers on Chicago teachers strike

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Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White campaigned among transit workers and firefighters Monday to rally support for striking Chicago teachers. The 26,000 striking teachers have entered their second week of the strike after voting on Sunday not to return to work. Now the striking teachers face the threat of injunction by Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

"People in general are a commodity," said one transit worker out picketing with the teachers. "The rich just want to use us and dump us as fast as possible."

At a nearby bus terminal, transit workers voiced their support for the teachers. "They should continue to fight," said David, a bus operator. "We're going through the same thing. We're working without a contract. They are phasing out full time bus operators for part timer work only. I'm behind the teachers 100 percent because they are fighting for our rights too."

White talked about the role of Emanuel and his relationship to Obama. Emanuel, Obama's former chief of staff and a current top fundraiser for the Obama reelection campaign, is carrying out in Chicago the same policy as the administration is pursuing nationally. "I thought that Obama and Rahm had a falling out over this strike, because Obama is always talking about being for education, but I guess not. But it doesn't really surprise me."

"Teachers have a right to strike," said another bus operator. "Rahm Emanuel only cares about himself and people with money, not students. I'm glad the teachers are taking a stand for the working class against their union. They have a union like us, which has been in bed with management for years and years."

Casey spoke in depth on the general political situation. Emanuel is "trying to do what they did to the air traffic controllers," he said, referring to Reagan's

firing to the PATCO air traffic controllers in 1981. "It's not a surprise that Obama is with Rahm Emanuel. Every politician is in the game."

"I think there has to be a new party for the poor people. The Democrats are no different than the Republicans, but they pretend, and that makes them more dangerous."

White responded, "Exactly. The Democrats use the unions to attack workers."

"The unions also make money from it," Casey replied. "Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, and other union officials make six-digit salaries, and they go right along with the Democrats. It also doesn't surprise me that the [United Auto Workers] helped Obama halve wages there. People just give him a pass because he's black."

"But that doesn't matter. Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson are both black, but they defend the system. They say that they work for the poor, but they really act for the rich."

"And that's what it comes down to. When the US goes to war, it's for the contractors to get money. I think that's why Kennedy was shot, because he wasn't totally on board with that. It's like the situation in Libya. The US forms and funds both sides of the conflict."

White also spoke to passing firefighters about the striking teachers. "We support them," one said. "Our last contract took two to four years to resolve, and right now we're working without a contract. The police are too. There is no difference between the Democrats and the Republicans. Sure, the Democrats will say, 'Don't vote for the Republicans because they break unions', but then they turn around and do this to the teachers."

On the picket line at a north side high school, an

Illinois state employee supporting the teachers, who asked not to be named, spoke to White. “[Illinois] Governor [Pat] Quinn is going after us just like Emanuel is doing to the teachers. Quinn is a Democrat but it doesn’t matter—these are both parties of money.

“The state employees should already be on strike,” she added. “Our contract expired on June 30, the same time as the teacher’s. They’re stripping us of step raises and reimbursement for educational expenses.

“My union, AFSCME, is already selling us out. They won’t call a strike. Instead they are dividing the older workers and the young with two tier wages and benefits. The second tier won’t be able to retire until they have 30 years or hit 67 years old. You used to have to have a combination of years and age of 85.

White replied by noting, “Democrats in some ways are more sophisticated than the Republicans. While the Republicans denounce the unions, Democrats seek to work with them in imposing the same attack on the working class.”

“Quinn and Emanuel are like right-wing Republicans,” the state worker said. “AFSCME says they are ‘our friends.’ But the Democrats are getting away with things that the Republicans never could do. Quinn is not honoring our wage agreement from the last contract.”



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