

Talk by socialist candidate evokes lively discussion

Jerry White reports on international tour in Detroit

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Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White spoke at a meeting called by the Wayne State University chapter in Detroit of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality Wednesday evening on the experiences from his recent tour of Sri Lanka and Europe. His talk evoked a lively discussion among those in attendance, who included Wayne State students as well as young workers from the surrounding community.

In his remarks, White explained that the policies that will be pursued by whichever of the two big business candidates who wins the US presidential election—Mitt Romney or Barack Obama—will be determined not by their campaign promises but by the economic crisis of American and world capitalism.

The world economic meltdown that began in 2008 on Wall Street, said White, has spread to Europe, Asia and Latin America. “No portion of the world is escaping the crisis.”

“That is why we do not consider my international tour as a diversion from our election campaign in the US, but an expression of our most essential aim: the fight for an international strategy and program to unite workers around the world against the global corporations and banks that oppress workers in every country. US workers cannot oppose austerity, attacks on democratic rights or the catastrophe of war on the basis of a nationalist program.”

White said the illusions that had existed among wide layers of the world’s population that the election of the first African-American president would bring change have been dashed by the course of events. Overseas, the Obama administration has carried out a right-wing militarist policy, expanding the war in Afghanistan while launching new interventions in Libya and Syria. At home, the Obama administration has escalated the war on the working class, using the economic crisis to drive down wages and shred what little remains of the social safety net.

“A ‘new normal’ is emerging,” said White, “in which the so-called ‘American standard of living’ has been thrown out the window and workers are being thrown back to the back-breaking exploitation and poverty wages their great-grandfathers once endured.”

Speaking about the teachers’ strike in Chicago that erupted earlier this week, White explained that the Obama administration was spearheading the assault on public education. White emphasized that the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality solidarized themselves with the courageous stand taken by the Chicago teachers, who are fighting for the interests of the entire working class.

At the root of the deplorable conditions facing young people and workers all over the world, said White, was the failure of the capitalist profit system. He related an experience in Sri Lanka, where he visited the home of a young plantation worker. Ten people slept crowded in a small room on a floor made of dried cow dung. When White asked the young worker what he thought of the images of modern houses he saw on television, the young worker replied, “Everyone should have a decent place to live.”

White explained that the source of poverty was not a lack of resources or technology, but the misallocation and squandering of resources under capitalism. The productive forces of mankind, said White, were more than sufficient, if freed from private ownership and organized on a rational basis, to abolish poverty and want on a world scale.

The growing movement of the working class internationally against the assault on its jobs and living conditions had to confront the fact that the old trade union organizations function as a police force for the multinational corporations and governments, said White. “The working class has to break free from these rotten organizations and build new organizations committed to a struggle against the capitalist profit system.”

This fight, said White, had to include a struggle against those pseudo-left tendencies that defend the unions and seek to keep the working class tied to the Democratic Party through the promotion of racial politics.

Following White's report, a lively and wide-ranging discussion ensued. White fielded many questions from the audience, including on the nature of capitalist globalization, the unity of youth and older workers, socialism and innovation, and the attacks on public education.

A Wayne State student, Ila, asked about globalization. White explained that the fundamental conflict in society was between the development of globalized production and national economy. The working class, White emphasized, was an international class and workers had no interest in slaughtering one another over the division of markets and raw materials. "The resources of the world must be marshaled in a rational manner. That means ending the domination of the world economy by the big banks and corporations," he said.

In response to another student who asked if the nationalization of industry would stifle innovation White replied, "Nationalization will not stifle innovation, but unlock it. The potential of human beings is crushed every day by capitalism. The raising of the cultural and intellectual level of the people will unlock enormous creativity."

Autumn, a psychology student at Wayne State, asked about the relationship between the youth and older the generations. White pointed to the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, which were initiated by young workers and students, as well as the recent strike by students in Quebec. "Young people are facing a situation where their standard of living will be lower than that of their parents. However, young people cannot defend their interests in isolation. It is important to see these as class, not generational, questions. We fight for the unity of all sections of the working class, young and old, black and white, native born and immigrant."

A young worker asked if socialism was compatible with the Bill of Rights in the US Constitution. In reply, White explained that Obama was the first president in US history to declare that he had the right to order the assassination of a US citizen without judicial review. "The Constitution is being tossed overboard under the guise of the war on terror." Socialism, White said, would mean a vast expansion of democracy by bringing democracy into the work place, allowing workers to make decisions over the most vital areas of their daily lives.

In answer to a question about how the transition from capitalism to socialism would take place, White replied, "A socialist transformation will require a revolutionary struggle. The revolutionary struggle of the masses is not alien to American traditions. This month, marks 150 years since the

issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln. The freeing of the slaves in the United States was one of the largest property transfers in world history. Every right the working class has ever won has been gained in bitter struggle against the American ruling class." The working class, said White, needed a revolutionary leadership to carry this struggle forward to victory.

A couple of students took exception to White's assertion that the eradication of poverty would be possible with a rational utilization of the world's productive forces. One student, citing the writings of B.F. Skinner, who advocated a lifestyle of "minimal consumption," argued that the problem was the "consumerism" of the American people.

White replied that the Socialist Equality Party did not agree with those, such as the Green Party, who blamed the development of technology itself for the problems, such as global warming, that confronted mankind. Technology, freed from the grip of capitalist private ownership, said White, contained limitless promise for the raising of man's material and spiritual level. Given the level of man's technical development, the persistence of abject poverty for the majority of the world's population was unnecessary, inhuman and irrational.

A sociology student, who said that she had several relatives who were educators, asked why schools were being built to accommodate larger class sizes. White replied, "What is evident to teachers is that the present education system organized under capitalism is irrational. Class sizes are growing while schools are being closed." White said a vast reallocation of resources for education was necessary to hire new teachers and construct more schools.

Following the meeting, an animated informal discussion continued. A number of students said they were interested in helping to build the IYSSE chapter on campus. Jacob Martin told the WWS, "Like so many in this area of the country, I am someone who has been forced through hardship by the forces of capitalism. I found Mr. White's speech enlightening. In light of the recent party conventions, it was nice to finally hear someone speak truthfully to me without buzzwords or platitudes and speak to the obvious inequities here and elsewhere."



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