

SEP conferences in California outline the socialist perspective in the 2012 elections

Our reporters
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Last weekend, the Socialist Equality Party held conferences in Los Angeles and Berkeley, California, outlining the socialist perspective in the 2012 elections. Conferences will be held this coming weekend in New York City (November 3) and Detroit, Michigan (November 4).

SEP National Chairman David North and SEP presidential candidate Jerry White spoke at both conferences. SEP National Secretary Joseph Kishore introduced the meeting in Los Angeles. Both conferences unanimously passed a resolution entitled "Build the Socialist Equality Party!" after extensive discussion.

In opening the LA conference, which was attended by students and workers from San Diego and Los Angeles County, Kishore said, "The elections are being held under conditions of the worst economic and social crisis since the Great Depression, though one would certainly not know this from the statements and proposals of the two candidates, Obama and Romney."

After reviewing the state of the world economy, Kishore said that the real plans of the ruling class, represented by both the Democrats and Republicans, were not being discussed. These include a wholesale attack on social programs, the expansion of war abroad, and an escalating attack on democratic rights.

Kishore placed central emphasis on the significance of Obama's assassination program, details of which were recently revealed in a *Washington Post* article. "The reactionary character of the Obama administration, of American imperialism as a whole, is epitomized in the policy of assassination. This government has declared, as a matter of state policy, its authority to kill anyone, including US citizens, without any judicial review, by executive decision alone."

At both meetings, Jerry White spoke extensively about the program and experience of the SEP election campaign, including its intervention among workers and youth throughout the country and internationally.

"The great mass of workers and young people, if they vote at all, will do so with no confidence that either candidate will take any measures to improve their conditions," White said in Los Angeles. "The issue here is not to speculate on the outcome of

the election, but to reveal what this election says about the decay of American capitalism and American democracy, explain what is coming, and prepare an alternative for the working class, which is completely disenfranchised under the present system."

"This campaign has been the most extraordinary and powerful struggle for socialism, reaching the broadest layers of workers and young people in a generation," White continued. "We began to see an intersection between our political principles and struggle for international socialism and the strivings of the working class to overcome the political straightjacket that has led it to a dead end."

White concluded his presentation by emphasizing that while the campaign had been very successful, the fundamental task consists of consolidating and broadening the SEP's presence in the working class in preparation for the expanding social struggles that will emerge after the elections.

In his remarks, David North placed the elections within their historical context, reviewing the decay of American democracy. Speaking of the far-reaching significance of the government's assassination policy, North noted, "Consciousness always lags behind being, and our inability to fully comprehend even things we are witnessing before our eyes testifies to the gravity and complexity of the situation."

"During the past year, the president of the United States authorized the extra-judicial assassination of an American citizen," North said. "That is a staggering event. But it has not been the subject of discussion at any of the debates." Referring to the statement of Abraham Lincoln, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong," North added, "If extra-judicial assassination is not unconstitutional, then nothing is, and we have arrived at a point where really anything goes! We are faced with a situation that has no precedent in American history."

A central theme of the conferences was the gulf between the interests of the working class and the pro-Democratic Party organizations that speak on behalf of a privileged layer of the upper-middle class. Conference participants discussed the ways in which racial, gender, and sexual politics have been utilized as a means of obscuring the class issues.

In his main remarks and in his subsequent response to questions, North explained that the various tendencies which he

referred to as “pseudo-left” are united by their hostility to the working class and Marxism. Reviewing the state of the world economy and, in particular, the situation in Greece, North said, “The so-called ‘left’... has been totally paralyzed, has absolutely nothing to put forward. Having preached for decades that the issues of class are of marginal significance... they hang on to the rotting corpse of bourgeois democracy.”

Many issues were raised in the discussion period at the Los Angeles conference, including the SEP’s call for the nationalization of industry, its position on agricultural production, and its analysis of the influence of libertarian ideas among youth.

In answering one question, North stressed the importance of the struggle to clarify theoretical and historical questions as part of the struggle for socialist consciousness. “The moment one discusses the problem of socialist revolution,” he said, “one immediately must reference a whole series of vast historical experiences—the outbreak of World War I, the Russian Revolution, the fight against fascism, the Spanish Revolution.”

The SEP, North stressed, bases itself on a vast intellectual and political capital, including, above all, the achievements of Leon Trotsky and the subsequent struggles of the Fourth International. “When we call for building the Socialist Equality Party, we are talking about building a movement that bases itself on this capital... You cannot arrive at socialism via the Democratic Party. You cannot arrive at socialism through tactical alliances with the petty-bourgeois ‘left.’ You approach the working class by fighting those tendencies ruthlessly.”

At the Berkeley conference, there was an important discussion about spontaneity and the development of socialist consciousness within the working class. “No class builds its political leadership spontaneously,” North said, noting the substantial resources that the ruling class devotes to training and preparing future professional politicians. To successfully supplant its exploited condition with a consciously organized socialist economy, the working class must operate at the highest political level, North said.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to participants of the conference in Los Angeles. Gervacio, a resident of the working class community of Bell, said: “I found the conference to be very important and informative. This is information that everybody should know, especially the working class. This was a conference for the working class. The situation facing the working class is deteriorating so rapidly and drastically that eventually something big is going to have to happen in the world to change the conditions.”

Odara, a student, was impressed by the way the speakers “emphasized the philosophical and historical foundations of the party and why the party places so much importance on the role of the working class.” Odara added, “What really struck me is the relevance of the building of the party leadership, for example, in the situation that occurred in Egypt, where you

have the class struggles and the objective reality that pushes people to take mass action, but what becomes crucial is having a leadership that provides a historical perspective.”

Richard, who resides in Oceanside and works at a pharmaceutical plant, said he heard about the meeting from a co-worker. “Like most people,” he said, “I get disillusioned with the two-party system and lose hope in an alternative. I was falling into the trap of identity politics. I was very glad to hear about that, and about how the Democrats are in cahoots with the unions. You would think that’s a good thing, but actually they’re bringing down the workers. It’s the same strategy as the Republicans, but they go about it differently.

“I took out a (membership) application and there’s a good chance I’ll join. Like they say, if you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem.”

Kevin, a student at San Diego State University, heard about the conference from the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) chapter at his school. “I thought the meeting was very informative and provided concrete examples of the political situation in the United States and how both major parties don’t look after the interests of the working class. It stressed the importance of internationalism.”

He described the situation confronting youth in San Diego, saying, “I recall last year when there were protests. Students were working several jobs, taking out several loans, and despite all that they were not able to continue their education. The two main things facing young people are the lack of job opportunities and the realization that education is no longer a real possibility. There is definitely a feeling that neither of the two parties are offering a real solution to the problems we face.”

To register for the SEP conference in New York or Detroit, click here.



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