

Jerry White speaks at University of Michigan on post-election war threats

Our reporter
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Jerry White, the Social Equality Party's candidate for US president, addressed a meeting of workers and students at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor Tuesday night sponsored by the campus chapter of the SEP's youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).

White presented an overview of the social, economic, and military context of the presidential elections and fielded wide-ranging questions from the audience. In his opening remarks, he pointed out that with Election Day only three weeks away, both the Democratic and Republican campaigns were seeking to conceal from the people of the US and internationally the post-election plans of the American ruling class.

Both parties, White said, are united in the drive toward wider war in the Middle East and attacks on living conditions domestically.

Displaying a photograph of the US military armada being assembled in the Persian Gulf, White warned that after November 6, the political establishment would pursue "the escalation of war and military confrontations by US imperialism around the world, targeting Syria, Iran and ultimately Russia and China." Accompanying this policy is "the escalation of the class war against working people in the US," White explained.

Obama and his Republican opponent Mitt Romney are committed to "defending the interests of the corporate and financial aristocracy that rules this country, and the military-intelligence apparatus that defends it."

White pointed to a recent *New York Times* article that acknowledged that the arms being funneled to the so-called rebels in Syria were reaching Sunni

fundamentalists in terrorist organizations aligned with Al Qaeda. "In its effort to overthrow the Assad regime, install a US-backed puppet and prepare for an even bloodier war against Iran," White said, "the US is backing forces, which the American people have been told for more than a decade pose the most dangerous threat. This only shows the fraud of the so-called 'War on Terror,' which all along has been nothing more than a justification for seizing oil-rich and strategic regions of Central Asia and the Middle East, and carrying out sweeping attacks on democratic rights in the US."

Both Romney and Obama were committed to use the war machine to reassert US global dominance, White said, and prevent any challenges from economic rivals including China. "But American workers have no interests in fighting and dying on behalf of the same global corporations and banks that are waging a war against their living standards and social rights inside the US itself."

Pointing to the growing struggles of the working class in the US and internationally, White said the most essential question was building a new leadership. "The purpose of our election campaign is to build our party, the Socialist Equality Party, in order to prepare for the immense social struggles that will erupt after the elections, regardless of which big business candidate wins."

White contrasted the international and socialist program fought for by the SEP to the role of the unions and various upper middle class liberal and "left" organizations who were in one way or another promoting the Democratic Party. Holding up the latest issue of *The Nation* magazine, which had endorsed the president's re-election, White explained that the purpose of the call for a Democratic vote as "the lesser of two evils" was to protect the interests of an upper-

middle class social milieu, including trade union executives, academics and other professionals who had benefited from Obama's presidency.

These self-described "progressives," White said, had benefited from the attack on the working class and supported US imperialist intervention in Libya and Syria in the name of "human rights." Only the development of a politically independent movement of the working class, which advanced a socialist alternative to the capitalist system could oppose austerity, war and the destruction of democratic rights, White said.

Discussion followed with several questions centering on the historical decline of American capitalism and the role of the unions. "What is the relation of productivity growth over the past 30 years and wage stagnation?" asked a student. White related the decision of the American ruling elite to scrap the long-standing policy of "class compromise" between American capitalism and the trade unions in the late 1970s and 1980s. The shift, which began with the Democratic Carter administration and, which was expanded during the union-busting Reagan years, was bound up with the historic decline of American capitalism and the sharpening competition from Europe and Asia.

Mark, a public school teacher, asked, "What would you do to increase militancy within organized labor? To increase its voice? There was a glimpse of that in Chicago, but it seems like over the decades, with all the betrayals and defeats, that workers have lost the 'zeitgeist.'"

"Teachers confront an obstacle in the form of the union," White said. "In Chicago, the Chicago Teachers Union supports Obama, who is leading the assault on public education, and betrayed the teachers strike."

Mark agreed. "The Michigan Education Association [the state teachers union] is a part of the Democratic Party. They have sold us out. They don't represent us, and have knuckled under to capitalism and the Democrats. The UAW [United Auto Workers] has also sold workers out. We need more militancy."

White replied that the unions had spent decades undermining the militancy and solidarity of the working class. The objective crisis was driving workers into struggle in the US and internationally. While there would be no lack of militant struggles, White stressed, determination and self-sacrifice, while a prerequisite

for struggle, was no substitute for political insight and an understanding of the historical experiences of the working class and socialist movement. For that workers needed a new leadership, the Socialist Equality Party, to guide its struggles.



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