

Workers and students discuss upcoming SEP conference in Los Angeles

Our reporters

24 October 2012

In the final two weeks before the presidential election, Socialist Equality Party supporters in Los Angeles are aggressively campaigning to provide workers and youth a socialist alternative to Obama and Romney. On October 27, SEP presidential candidate Jerry White will be participating in the party's regional conference in the city to discuss the building of a new leadership in the working class for the struggles that will follow the election, regardless of which big business candidate wins.

In Los Angeles, as in the rest of the US, students, workers, the youth, and retirees face a bleak future. The official poverty rate in LA is around 26 percent, well above the state's average of 19 percent. Working people in the city face a range of hardships as they struggle to stay afloat as both political parties attack healthcare, education, pensions and other hard-won social benefits.

Conditions have deteriorated substantially in the aftermath of the 2008 financial meltdown. Many have lost their jobs or been forced to take on work that pays \$9 or \$10 per hour instead of the \$20 to \$25 an hour they were previously paid. In LA, these paltry wages ensure nothing but misery.

Young people entering the workforce, in particular, face poverty wages, short or irregular hours and the constant threat of dismissal at the whim of their employers. Few receive vacation days or other benefits.

Simultaneously, rising tuition costs, underfunding and swelling class sizes are driving many young people away from education. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa—a former union functionary for the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA)—is leading the attack on teachers through the implementation of the Obama administration's reactionary "school reform" agenda. Working in conjunction with various corporate interests

as well as the UTLA, the Democratic mayor has victimized teachers, slashed funding and promoted school privatization.

The WSWS spoke to workers and students about the upcoming SEP regional conference.

Hugh is a resident from Hawthorne, in his 60's, struggling to get by on his meager social security benefit. By the last week of each month he is out of money. When he shops, he walks if at all possible to save on gas. "In the 1960's you would go to school, get out, get a good job, work for thirty years, have a home and a good retirement. That time has long past and it now seems like a dream."

Hugh has no faith in either party, agrees that socialism makes the most sense but is skeptical that workers will ever achieve it. SEP supporters explained that the economic crisis and the political stranglehold exercised by the financial elite were driving tens millions of workers in the US and internationally into mass struggles. The key question, which would be discussed at the conference, they said, was the building of a mass political party of the working class—based on socialist policies—that would not betray the working class, as the trade unions had.

Amy, a college student, was asked what she thought of the two big business candidates, and if she saw any difference between them. "All I've seen is a bunch of electoral promises from both sides. I believed in Obama's promises [in 2008], but now my boyfriend and I talk often about how, after he took office, he continued business as usual: war, unemployment, crisis. None of the promises were kept. And then, when these politicians realize they can't hold their word, they start either making up excuse after excuse, or they blame the other party in a vicious cycle. This way no one is ever responsible."

Amy was invited to come to the conference. She replied, “I will discuss it with my boyfriend tonight. He will be interested as well, we talk about what’s happening regularly. I will make every effort to come. I want to learn more about socialism, there is so much confusion about it but I have a feeling I tend to agree with it.”

Juan, a Mexican immigrant, now a US citizen, works as a janitor. He said, “I don’t understand politics very well—to me they all seem like crooks. But in 2008 I thought that a black man would have more “ternura” [that he would be more sympathetic] towards immigrants. I don’t think that is how it went. I hear of deportations in restaurants and plants. I have family working in the textile district downtown LA. The fear is not gone away. They work for nothing and on top of it they have to watch their back because they might be taken to the border tonight.”

The SEP campaigner explained that, under Obama, deportations actually increased from the Bush days. Moreover, a discussion ensued on the reactionary and cynical character of Obama’s recent DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), which not only applies to a small minority of immigrants, but it simply regulates deportations in a time-elapsed form.

The Republican and Democratic parties are equally determined to impoverish the working class, the SEP explained. The vital interests of the majority of the population could only be defended through a political struggle of the working class to break the economic and political dictatorship of the corporate and financial elite and reorganize society on the basis of the social ownership of the banks and basic industry.

The SEP urges workers and students to take up the fight for international socialism and a new mass, political party for the working class by registering now for the upcoming regional conference.



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