Jerry White addresses Toronto meeting

Our reporter
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Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for President of the United States, addressed a lively meeting attended by some thirty workers and youth in Toronto, Canada Sunday afternoon.

This was the third time White has traveled to Canada during the campaign to present the international socialist program of the SEP to Canadian workers. He was the keynote speaker at a Montreal meeting this past summer called by the SEP (Canada) during the Quebec student strike against tuition fee increases. White also intervened among Ford workers in Windsor, Ontario to politically mobilize workers against the nationalist policies and the concessions contracts negotiated by the Canadian Auto Workers union bureaucracy.

The meeting was chaired by SEP Canada National Secretary Keith Jones. In his introductory remarks, Jones focused on the international character of the assault on the living standards of the working class. Greece, he said, was the "lab of social-counterrevolution for the European ruling class, where the financial markets are imposing a reduction of living standards unparalleled in peacetime." The globally coordinated attack on the working class, he said, had to be answered with the development of an international counteroffensive of the working class based on a socialist program.

Jones explained how the trade unions in Canada have carried out the same nationalist policies as their counterparts internationally. This has led to the imposition of deep concessions contracts on Canadian auto and steel workers, as well as workers at Canada Post, Air Canada and Canadian Pacific Rail. He pointed out that at the height of the Quebec student strike, with hundreds of thousands marching in the streets, the trade unions refused to lend support of any kind to the burgeoning social movement. At the same time, the social democratic NDP, moving ever-rightward, refused to support the students, arguing that it was a "provincial matter" beyond their jurisdiction.

In his own remarks, White said that throughout his campaign travels—across the United States and in Europe and Asia—workers he met faced the conditions, as government after government rammed through austerity programs with the support of the unions and their allies among "left" organizations that serve to prop up the political establishment.

In the United States, White explained that, regardless of which big business party won the 2012 elections, "The next administration will continue and escalate the destruction of the social conditions of the working class."

He said that the pro-war and economic austerity policies of both parties have been "brushed over in their election campaigns, as they prepare new crimes behind the backs of the American people," including the threat of a major new war in the Middle East against Iran.

White then reviewed the devastating impact of the world economic crisis on the working class. "Already in Greece, Portugal and Spain," White told the audience, the policies of the financial elite were "producing mass unemployment, poverty and hunger." At the same time, the predatory imperialist interests of the American ruling class around the globe were leading to another regional war in the Middle East that could rapidly transform into a cataclysmic confrontation with Russia and China.

Using a projector, White showed images of protesting workers and youth in Montreal, Athens and Madrid, as well as images of working class families in these countries who have been forced to scavenge through dumpsters for food.

These conditions "are producing mass opposition among workers and youth," White said. "In the US,

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workers are also entering into rebellion, as shown in the recent teachers' strike in Chicago."

Whatever their tactical differences, the Democrats and Republicans have entirely repudiated the idea that the population has any social rights.This was clearly shown by Republican candidate Mitt Romney's comments to a private fundraising meeting, in which he decried the notion that anyone should have a right to basic social necessities like food, shelter, an education, or healthcare.

White pointed out that the response of the Obama campaign to Romney's naked class hatred was entirely tactical. In fact, the Democrats accept the central premise of Romney's argument that the working class has no social rights.

"The reformist policies of the FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] administration, which were only carried out in response to mass social struggles by the working class, and subsequent programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, are now being repudiated," White told the meeting.

"In fact, for the past 30 years, wealth redistribution has gone upward towards the super rich." He presented a graph showing that in the 1950s some two-thirds of social wealth in the US went to labor, largely in the form of wages, while the top rate of tax on the wealthiest earners was 90 percent. Today, however, only about half of national wealth goes to wages, while the highest tax rate is only around 32 percent.

"Only by mobilizing the enormous strength of the international working class on a program of social equality, that is—socialism —will workers, who are already stirring against the ruling elites around the world, be properly armed with the perspective to put an end to a capitalist system that puts the profits of a few ahead of the needs of the many."

A lengthy and lively discussion ensued after the reports. Workers and youth asked questions about the SEP's positions on national democratic movements in the "developing world," the role of ethnic and religious divisions, the nature of the "Occupy Wall Street" movement, and whether capitalism would self-destruct under its own contradictions. Many of the attendees stayed long after the close of the meeting, engaging in discussions, exchanging contact information and purchasing literature from the party's book stand.

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