

WSWS 15th anniversary meeting held in Detroit

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The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality held a public meeting at Wayne State University in Detroit Sunday to discuss the significance of 15 years of the *World Socialist Web Site*. The meeting was attended by a wide cross section of workers and young people, including college students, teachers, Detroit city workers and other public sector workers, artists and professionals.

David North, the chairman of the WSWS international editorial board and national chairman of the SEP in the United States, was the main speaker at the meeting, which is part of a series of meetings being held across the US and internationally on the 15th anniversary. (This includes a meeting in Toronto on April 21 and London on May 5)

North began his report by explaining the significance of the WSWS and its 15 years of daily publication. "It is through the WSWS, founded in 1998, that the perspective of Marxism and scientific socialism has been developed as a means of orienting workers, youth, students and socialist intellectuals all over the world. It is an extraordinary achievement for the international workers movement."

He explained that the WSWS had decided to mark the anniversary through the development of year-by-year Chronology, produced on the WSWS. The Chronology, said North, had clarified the significance of the last decade and a half, a "pre-revolutionary period of intensifying economic, political, social and intellectual crisis." He stressed the need to always understand the present situation as a moment in a historical process, conditioned by objective laws of socio-economic development and the conflict of class forces.

North outlined the theoretical foundations of the WSWS in classical Marxism and the history of the Trotskyist movement. He drew out striking parallels between the period from 1898-1913 and the period from 1998-2013. Reviewing the past 15 years, North placed particular

emphasis on the economic crisis and the social counter-revolution waged by the ruling class, the eruption of militarism, and the deep-going decay of American democracy.

In conclusion North stressed the coming period would be one of explosive class struggle, and that the decisive question was that of revolutionary leadership. He called on all those present to devote themselves to the building of the revolutionary party as the new leadership of the working class.

In the discussion period that followed the main report a number of workers and young people spoke on the significance of political struggle carried out by the WSWS.

Greg, a classical musician from the Detroit area, explained that he had first become aware of the WSWS during the six-month strike by members of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in 2010-2011. "The mainstream media's spotty coverage of the issues involved in the strike was biased toward management's point of view," Greg said. The WSWS provided extensive coverage of the strike, including many interviews from the musicians involved.

Greg said his main concerns included the privatization of education and the removal of art from the education process, the assault on Medicare and Social Security, the lack of universal health care, low wages, unemployment and global warming. "The Socialist Equality Party has put forth a bill of social rights for the working class which, if fully implemented, would solve my concerns."

In conclusion he explained that despite the outcome of the DSO strike, which resulted in a 22 percent pay cut and the loss of 11 orchestra positions, musicians remained determined to fight.

A retired public worker said that he saw the need for a new definition of equality beyond that advanced by the American Revolution and American Civil War.

In response WSWS Arts Editor David Walsh explained that a society divided into classes was incompatible with genuine equality. “Genuine equality begins with the expropriation of the giant corporations and their democratic control by the population.”

WSWS editorial board member and SEP 2012 US presidential candidate Jerry White read out greetings to the conference from a New York City school bus driver on behalf of their recently formed action committee.

The greetings began, “I would first like to send best wishes to the Socialist Equality Party and congratulate the *World Socialist Web Site* on your 15th Anniversary!

“I would like to say hello to all rank-and-file workers in Detroit on behalf of the Drivers & Escorts Action Committee (DEAC). Our committee was formed by New York City school bus drivers and escorts after the defeat of our month-long strike against Mayor Bloomberg and the elimination of employee protection provisions from our contracts, which the city claimed was illegal after having these job protections for 33 years.”

She explained that their union, the Amalgamated Transit Union, had betrayed the strike, sending workers back without a contract in face of demands by the bus companies for massive concessions, including wage and benefit cuts and the loss of seniority protection.

She said the WSWS was the only news source that stood behind the drivers and escorts during the strike. “I also want to thank the WSWS for helping us form our action committee. It is truly time for all working class people to wake up and stand united because we have every right to decent jobs, wages, health benefits and pensions. We must advance ourselves from the destruction of the American ruling elite. We all need to begin and/or join Action Committees all over the country, so our voices and struggles can be heard.”

In his summation SEP National Secretary Joe Kishore pointed to the significance of events taking place in Detroit, where an emergency manager armed with dictatorial powers has been imposed. “In some ways Detroit is the center of the attack on the working class throughout the US... This is being watched by the ruling class all over the world as a model for their policies.”

Kishore said that the SEP was waging an aggressive campaign to mobilize the working class against the emergency manager. He called for those present fight to build a new revolutionary leadership in the working class.

Following the meeting many people stayed to continue the political discussion. A WSWS reporting team interviewed a number of those attending.

Will, a psychology student at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, said, “The meeting provided important historical context to explain the Democratic Party’s support for war. In the election, there was the argument that we could ‘pressure’ the Democrats to shift. But there is a historical process that has caused them to shift to the right, and that is something that won’t be changed by a personnel change, putting in a new face. It’s much more fundamental.”

Betsy, a former Detroit city worker, told the WSWS, “I thought the conference did a good job outlining the nature of the problem. Where to do we go from here? I have many questions. What is the solution? How do we wrest control from the ruling class? I will be coming to many more meetings, to learn more.”

Mark, an Ypsilanti public school teacher, said, “The presentation put into a nutshell the changes that have occurred in society. The Obama administration is rolling back a lot of aspects of the New Deal. In education, there has been a redistribution of funding, from public to private schools.

“To make cuts on the schools,” Mark said, “the Obama administration has resorted to a vilification and demonization of teachers. This has been a component of both Bush’s No Child Left Behind and Barack Obama’s Race To The Top. He has ramped up his campaign of for-profit charters.”

Mark pointed to the role of the unions in the attack on teachers. “I give [the Michigan Education Association] \$1,000 a year, and all I get is lower wages and more money taken to pay for health care. The bureaucrats continue to make tons of money. They take our money and channel it into the coffers of the Democratic Party.”

Joe, a sophomore at University of Michigan, said he was impressed with the report. “The presentation was eye opening. It broke down the development of the WSWS historically and how it developed with the movement. I also was able to see how objective it has been and how correct the program of the party has been on the political events over the past fifteen years.”



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