

SEP presidential candidate Jerry White kicks off fall campaign with meeting in Chicago

Our reporters
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With two months to go until the US presidential elections, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) began its speaking tour for Jerry White and Niles Niemuth, the SEP's candidate for US president and vice president. White traveled to Chicago, Illinois to speak on "Socialism and the 2016 Elections" Thursday night. The candidate held a successful meeting at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), which was attended by more than 30 people.

Students from UIC and other area universities, as well as young workers, attended from across the Chicago region, some traveling from over an hour away. A serious layer of students and young workers came to find out more about a socialist alternative to the breakdown of capitalism.

White began his report by highlighting the unprecedented character of the 2016 elections. "The 2016 elections," he said, "are marked by a political crisis within the United States, an economic crisis that is gripping the world economy and increasing tensions between countries that threaten the real danger of a conflict between the United States, Russia and China." He added that this conflict held within it the prospect of nuclear war, and that "none of these matters are discussed in the 2016 US elections."

Moreover, the 2016 elections were being used, particularly by the Clinton campaign, to create a mandate for war against Russia.

White said that despite the mudslinging by Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump, there were no fundamental differences between either capitalist politician when it comes to war, state repression and the exploitation of the working class by the financial aristocracy. Both Clinton and Trump—the most widely hated candidates in American history—are representatives of the corporate and political establishment.

At the same time, White showed that there is a growth

of opposition and the development of the class struggle, both in the United States and around the world. The Bernie Sanders campaign, he added, was merely a temporary beneficiary of this objective radicalization of workers and youth. Despite the efforts of the Sanders campaign to channel opposition behind Clinton, he underscored that this social anger is not going away.

The issues young people face, including endless war, student loan debts and terrible job prospects, cannot be resolved within the framework of capitalism. White insisted that the working class could find a way forward only through the building of a mass socialist movement.

After the meeting, serious questions were raised among the audience. There was a great deal of interest in what a socialist alternative could do to resolve the pressing problems facing millions of people. White fielded questions about crime, attacks on education, the SEP's campaign among autoworkers, the danger of Trump, the issue of war and the role of various so-called "left parties," such as the Green Party.

One student asked how the SEP would deal with Russian or Chinese aggression. White responded that the greatest danger on the planet was American imperialism. He pointed to the growing encroachment of NATO and the US against Russia as well as the encirclement of China by US forces as part of the Obama administration's "Pivot to Asia." At the same time, he stressed that the working class of China and Russia must deal with its ruling class, alongside its class brothers and sisters across the world. But every effort of American imperialism for regime change in these countries must be opposed.

Addressing the role of the Green Party and its candidate Jill Stein in the elections, and its recent use of seemingly antiwar rhetoric, White noted, "Jill Stein insists that you can stop war somehow by appealing to the conscience of the powers that be. That if you can prove to the ruling elites, the rich and powerful, that what they're doing is

unsustainable and disastrous even for themselves, that they'll pull themselves back from this course. Now that perspective has proven thoroughly bankrupt. We say that the only way to stop war is to attack what causes war, and that is the capitalist system."

The Socialist Equality Party fights to arm the growing opposition of the working class with a revolutionary leadership and program, White said. He noted that social media and the Internet can play a key role in reaching broad layers of workers and youth. Social revolution, he added, is an objective process that arises out of capitalism with the entrance of masses into political life. But the most critical issue for the working class is theoretical and scientific knowledge of the laws of social development that propel them into struggle against capitalism.

After the meeting, many in the audience stayed to have informal political discussions, purchase literature and donate to the campaign.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party spoke to students following the meeting. Sasha, an electrical engineering student at UIC who was born in the former Yugoslavia, said, "It was an interesting speech. There was a lot of stuff I agreed with, and coincided with a lot of ideas I had developed looking into politics over the last semester."

Sasha said he agreed with White's analysis of Black Lives Matter, saying, "Instead of getting people united, they're splitting people up into more and more sectors. They're not addressing actual issues like the experience of the working class."

Speaking on his experiences in the Balkans in the 90s, he said, "It seemed like [the US and its allies] destroyed or destabilized the area and picked up whatever pieces were left. And they bought out many companies afterwards, because prices are usually in economic ruin after such situations. So it seemed like none of it was for any real positive help, it was more so for their own benefit."

Mohammed, an engineering student, said, "There is no good choice in the presidential elections. You are just picking which poison you want to die from. Trump and Clinton are not people you want to represent the country. It is supposed to be that people vote for who they want for president—but nobody in their right mind wants Clinton or Trump.

"I am sick of these wars. I am Palestinian, and we have seen nothing but war. The wars only make matters worse—we don't want any more. It would be great to unite the working class—we are the main contributors to the

population. My father is part of the working class, and 90 percent of my friends' fathers are from the working class. To have the rich try to represent who we are is a false representation. Clinton and Trump are not who we are.

"To unify everybody with common interests will not only help the people increase our standard of living and get along better, it will improve things on a larger scale as well—and I'm pretty sure that's what most of the people want. I believe the same thing as you."

Andy, a history major at UIC, said, "I think he [White] did a great job outlining the conflicts involving the US in the world situation. He captured the trap presented by the two-party system. You simply can't change the situation we're in while working within the two-party system. I really liked that he did go after Sanders, even though I supported Sanders.

"The thing lacking for me in the talk was a definitive plan of action to advance the struggle." Andy asked what the SEP is doing to prepare the working class for conquest of state power: "Because the billionaires—the Buffetts and the Sorosés—aren't going to give it up, is the party preparing for a fight?"

An SEP member explained that, yes, such a fight is being prepared, and it is a political fight. Based on the experiences leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the central focus of the party's efforts in the working class and on the campuses is the building of a political leadership to guide the coming struggles of workers against the capitalist system.

Such a historical understanding of the lessons of political experiences in the working class led the discussion to Andy's field of study, about which he said, "Without a knowledge of past struggles, you don't know where you are."



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