

Attendees at SEP anti-war conference speak on war danger, US election

A WSWS reporting team
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A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team spoke to workers and young people attending the conference “Socialism vs. Capitalism and War,” held Saturday at Wayne State University in Detroit. Many said they were impressed by the content of the presentations and encouraged by the struggle the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) were waging against war.

Izzy and Edward both work in factories and came to the conference from Muskegon, in western Michigan. Edward said, “Muskegon is pretty impoverished. It used to be a heavy manufacturing hub, and it’s been hollowed out like Detroit.”

Izzy commented, “I’m the daughter of a lieutenant colonel. Growing up, I always felt like I was at odds and the system wasn’t working. Why is it being held up as something great? I came to hear the other side, and how socialism is addressing such a massive and divisive issue. And you’re right, you guys are the only ones talking about war.”

Izzy noted that she had previously supported Sanders, and later the Green Party. She said, “What I couldn’t quite fit in with the Green Party is that it’s too local. We’re a global society, we can’t be just local. And I feel that everything I liked about the Greens, and everything I liked about Bernie, is now here.”

Edward added, “I hope this conference is indicative of a larger struggle for people to take the initiative.”

A number of workers from Flint attended the conference. Gladys, who previously worked at General Motors’ now-shuttered Buick plant in Flint, described her experience living in Flint throughout the water crisis. “I bought a home in Flint in the early 2000s and then the real estate market busted. Then they poisoned Flint’s water through stealing our democracy with an emergency manager!

“Now I have a home that is worth nothing and I have lead in my blood. I have copper [water] service lines, which they’ll never replace, and I’m still getting lead coming through my kitchen sink. We’ve been back on Detroit water for months, but because of what they did with the Flint River, we’re still suffering.”

Asked what she thought about the speakers’ presentations on the threat of war, she replied, “I think they’re exactly right. That’s why there’s no money for infrastructure, for education, for poverty, food or health care. Because it’s all being spent on war. Global annihilation, world war, which would kill millions of people in the blink of an eye--that kind of talk doesn’t bother the ‘leaders’ of the nation.

“From being here today, I truly believe this group here, Jerry White and the other candidates, have absolutely addressed every issue that I, as a voter, would want to hear about. Something has to change, and I don’t see any change coming from the two main parties. I’m going to go ahead and do a write-in vote, because I’m not going to give either [the Democrats or Republicans] my vote. I refuse.”

Rashard also came from Flint, where he is beginning work as a substitute teacher. He explained that while he had previously supported Hillary Clinton in the election primaries, “after learning more about the SEP’s platform and what its objectives are for building up a movement to combat the capitalistic system, it changed my focus.”

He continued, “The speakers this morning were absolutely correct about what’s happening and what Hillary’s planning to do militarily should she win.

“How in the world is the national defense budget larger than that for education? And schools are constantly being closed, prisons are being constructed, and that to me is a huge concern. Why isn’t there a

strong emphasis on public education?”

Commenting on the discussion at the conference on the Black Lives Matter movement and identity politics, he said, “I read an article on the WSWS about Black Lives Matter receiving money from the Ford Foundation. And I had to say to myself, ‘What is that organization going to do with \$100 million?’ And then, when one of the contributors came up and mentioned that what’s really going on is for them to take that money to put black young people in echelons of power, positions of profit, and that sort of thing, I really began to realize how corrupt that is.”

Summing up his experience at the conference, Rashard said, “Growing up in school, I was taught that ‘socialism’ and ‘working class’ were taboo words in America. The more I have become enlightened about the true essence of capitalism, I’m really taken aback. I’ve noticed that at the political level, even for those who get elected with good intentions, the promises they make aren’t realized and the conditions are pretty much the same.

“I think it’s important that we mobilize, and that people get involved and join the SEP and the IYSSE and begin to really build up this movement. We need to create a party to combat this system, because I do believe the voice of the working class has definitely been ignored and needs to be heard. We need to organize so that we can rise up and take action, in this country and around the world.”

Cardell, a student from Henry Ford Community College in Detroit, said he had heard about the SEP while visiting the Detroit Institute of Arts. “Someone from the SEP handed a leaflet to me when I was on my way out [of the DIA]. I never trusted either party, the Democrats or the Republicans. I was skeptical at first because I had always heard bad things about socialism, but after hearing more about it, I realized that all the bad things I had heard were coming from people who supported the two-party system, and that system doesn’t represent me.”

Phil, 25, lives in Hamtramck, a working-class enclave within Detroit. He said, “It was very informative. It was the primer I was looking for to get into the IYSSE. It was less intimidating and more public. I’ve been reading the *World Socialist Web Site* and I’ve heard about the IYSSE. It was good to see all the representatives and actually physically see them talking

about it.

“War is just a tool used by the capitalist machine to gain more capital. We’re killing innocent people without justification. I’ve thought war was ridiculous from a young age.

“I’ve always been wary of politics because there are so many lies involved, and I know that it’s mostly about money. But this year has been even more ridiculous. We’ve been left with these two completely unviable options and everyone is looking for a way out.”

Matt, who works as a student employee at Eastern Michigan University, said, “Hearing the speakers talk about identity politics was clarifying. I mean, previously I just thought, this is just how people talk now.

“But then, when you see it laid out the way it was here, and you hear about the class issues, you realize that the root cause isn’t the identity issues but the root cause is the class issues. I was taught that war and other issues were rooted in racial and gender identity issues. But it’s the other way around.”



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