

Obama makes election eve appeal to students and workers at University of Michigan

Shannon Jones
8 November 2016

On the eve of the November 8 election, President Obama traveled to the campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor to make a last minute appeal to students and workers on behalf of Hillary Clinton in a state that is viewed as critical to the Democratic candidate's election chances.

The decision to send the president to Michigan reflects the deep concern in the Clinton camp that the state, which had been considered reliably Democratic, could fall to Republican Donald Trump. Clinton strategists are worried that the lack of enthusiasm for the Democratic nominee among students, as well as African Americans, could result in a low voter turnout in a state that voted for Clinton's rival for the Democratic nomination, Bernie Sanders, in the primary election.

Indeed, Clinton herself made a visit the same day to Grand Valley State University in western Michigan.

A campaign stop by Clinton Friday in Detroit attracted largely more-prosperous middle class layers and very few students or workers. Remarks by attendees to the *World Socialist Web Site* at that event reflected a general lack of enthusiasm for the Democratic candidate among the more working class elements.

In Ann Arbor, the audience for Obama, estimated at 9,000, consisted of a large layer of middle class professionals along with a section of students and numbers of health care workers. The Ann Arbor area has been a stronghold of support for the Democratic Party, with Washtenaw County, where Ann Arbor is located, going for Obama over Republican challenger Mitt Romney by a 2-1 margin in 2012.

Chelsea Clinton introduced the president. In her brief remarks, she stressed the standard identity politics themes advanced by Hillary Clinton. She went on to assert that her mother, if elected, would continue the economic policies of Obama "and all he has accomplished."

This offers cold comfort to millions of college students

saddled with massive debt and workers confronting the prospect of dead-end, low-wage and part-time jobs. The economic legacy of the Obama administration has been a bonanza for Wall Street, with huge income gains for the top 1 percent and falling and stagnating wages for the vast majority. The main beneficiaries have been wealthy individuals like Chelsea Clinton herself, who is married to a hedge fund manager.

For his part Obama adopted his usual folksy persona. He rattled off a list of the supposed achievements of his administration, including the Affordable Care Act, which has seen a huge rise in insurance rates, with many workers losing employer-based coverage.

At one point, Obama even had the gall to criticize Trump for advocating that auto companies shift their operations to nonunion areas to obtain lower wages. This from a president who oversaw the slashing of wages of newly hired General Motors and Chrysler workers by 50 percent as well as benefit cuts for retired workers as part of the auto industry restructuring his administration carried out in 2009, with the collaboration of the United Auto Workers union.

Continuing his appeal to the trade union bureaucracy, Obama went into a nationalist rant against China, denouncing Trump for using Chinese steel in his hotels. "He is giving jobs to Chinese steelworkers, not American steelworkers," he declared.

Referring to the alienation felt by youth and students over the mudslinging by both the Clinton and Trump camps, Obama urged young people to "tune that out." The main issue, he asserted, was Clinton's greater fitness to be "commander in chief."

He did not mention the fact that Clinton has called for the establishment of a "no-fly zone" in Syria, an act that could trigger a confrontation between the US and nuclear-armed Russia. Nor did he point out that his own administration has been at war longer than any other US

administration.

He then spoke of Clinton's economic program. The mention of affordable college tuition, a major applause line during the campaign of Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, drew little response from the audience, an indication that those in attendance attached little credibility to Clinton's promises.

The last portion of Obama's speech was empty of content, devoted to promoting identity politics and mouthing general platitudes referencing democratic ideals long abandoned in practice by the US ruling elite.

In speaking to those attending the event, this reporter was struck by the difficulty that even the most ardent Hillary Clinton supporters had in articulating the actual issues motivating that support. No one expressed any great hope that economic conditions would improve under a Clinton presidency. Many indicated that they were mainly voting against Trump, citing his "unfitness" for the job.

Several workers agreed to share their thoughts at length with this reporter. A common focus was concern over the personal attacks in the Clinton-Trump contest and the lack of discussion of substantive issues.

Tammy, a part-time worker whose husband is employed as an automotive engineer, said she understood the economic anxiety tapped into by Trump. Her remarks belied the lying portrait that Obama painted of a prosperous and happy US populace.

"I think there is a lot of despair. Many people have lost their jobs. They feel they are paying taxes and not getting anything in return. One of my sons had to join the military so he could go to college."

When this reporter asked what she thought of the endless wars being pursued under the Obama administration, she replied, "It scares my son that one of these little wars could become a big war."

Referring to the experience of Obama's Affordable Care Act, she reported that her sister "has to pay for medication more than she ever paid before."

"I understand," she added, "why she is against Obamacare. It is hard to come up with the \$800 a month she has to pay for medicine. She is fortunate that she can pay, but what about people who can't?"

Referring to the general alienation felt toward both big business candidates, she remarked, "This is the first election where there are no signs in my neighborhood."

Jimmy, a young hospital worker, said that he had decided to vote for Clinton only over the course of the last few days. "Before that," he said, "I wasn't going to vote

for either. Trump, obviously, but Clinton supported the 1994 crime bill that put a lot of people unnecessarily in jail.

"This has been the only election where I have not been enthusiastic to vote. The only thing going for Hillary is that she is a woman. I have seen a lot of mudslinging, but no plans for the economy."

A retired medical worker said she had been a supporter of Bernie Sanders. Noting Trump's support in Michigan, she remarked, "Bernie won Michigan, so the upsetter, Trump, can also win. I had a son who graduated in 2009. He finally got a job, but it took a few years. We are feeling the impact of unregulated markets."

When the WSWS asked about the growing threat of a major war erupting with Russia out of the conflicts in the Middle East, or with China resulting from Obama's "pivot to Asia," she replied, "I hate to say it, but I think the question of war is taken for granted—the military industrial complex."

Remarking on the election, she said, "It's the worst I've seen. I hope it's the worst I'll ever see. I have hopes in Clinton, but as far as getting anything done, I don't know. She has ties to Wall Street.

"I liked Sanders' message about economic inequality. It made me hopeful for a movement like that. I think that is needed." But, she continued, "we are stuck with two parties."

This reporter explained that the Socialist Equality Party was running its own candidates for president and vice president to raise the central issues facing the working class, including the danger of war, that were being ignored by both the Democrats and Republicans. The role of Sanders had been to channel the anger and discontent of workers back into the Democratic Party.

She expressed gratitude for our taking the time to discuss the issues and said she would take a look at the *World Socialist Web Site*.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)