

Workers, students speak out against war, censorship and inequality at Detroit meeting

Tom Hall
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The *World Socialist Web Site* meeting this Sunday, “The Class Struggle and the Fight Against Internet Censorship,” found an important response from sections of workers throughout the American Midwest and Canada.

Workers, as well as students from various local universities, including Wayne State University and the University of Michigan, listened and participated intensely in a four-hour discussion on a socialist, internationalist perspective to oppose inequality, dictatorship, war and censorship.

The WSWWS spoke to several attendees after the conference.

Diane is a retired Detroit Public Schools teacher. She reacted strongly to the contribution to the conference by Shemeeka Hennings, the mother of Jacoby Hennings, the young autoworker whose death four months ago at the Woodhaven Stamping Plant near Detroit has yet to be explained. “They dropped any investigation into the Jacoby Hennings case,” Diane said. “If it were someone in the ruling class, it wouldn’t have been dropped.”

“Inequality at all levels [is rising alongside] unprecedented wealth,” she added. “I like the way the meeting dissected the wealth of someone like Jeff Bezos,” referring to the comments by WSWWS writer Eric London, who explained the social problems that could be resolved by taking control of the Amazon billionaire’s \$100 billion net worth.

“I think the question of censorship is scary. It’s about control,” Diane said. The ruling class will tell workers, “‘I will tell you what you need to know.’ I was a teenager during the Vietnam War. They would put the body count on TV. They lied then and they’re lying now.”

Jennifer is a young woman who lives in the Flint area who expressed interest in helping found a chapter of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality

(IYSSE) at the University of Michigan–Flint. “I’m very concerned about [internet censorship]. When I try to share political material on my own Facebook pages, I’m constantly asked (by FB) to pay to promote it. The new social media channels are becoming dominated by money already, like the mass media that existed before.”

Aditya works in the automotive industry as an engineer. Originally from India, Aditya came to the US in the late 1990s to earn a PhD and participated as a student in the 2003 protests against the war in Iraq.

Aditya spoke during the conference about the disappearance of the anti-war movement after the invasion of Iraq, which sparked an important discussion about the evolution of the middle class organizations that had led these protests. He noted that, even though Trump had made clear his intentions over Twitter a week in advance and had previously carried out airstrikes in 2017 over bogus chemical weapons claims, “there was almost no interest whatsoever in an organized anti-war protest.”

“When I asked this question to people on Facebook, they said, oh it’s too soon and Trump is confusing us with his tweets. But there was no confusion, if Trump tweeted he was going to strike, he was going to strike. So it’s a big difference from 2003,” Aditya said. “And I felt [the lack of protests] had something to do with working families getting economically weakened. After 2009, stock prices have gone up steadily, stock prices being a measure of corporate profits, and real wages, that is, wages measured against inflation, have fallen off.”

During the meeting, members of the SEP stressed that the absence of anti-war protests was not due to support for war among workers and youth. Rather, the upper middle class groups that had been involved in organizing the protests against the Iraq War worked to channel opposition behind the Democratic Party and then the Obama administration. These groups are now among the most fervent supporters of war in Syria.

The Putin government, Aditya said, “[has] to strike back—Russia can’t sit back and watch its soldiers getting killed. And definitely that will lead to a wider war. And that seems to be the intention of the ruling classes in the US.”

Aditya added that the ruling class “needs to keep a lid on social media, so that the mainstream media gets to put forth only its point of view, put forth its anti-Russia views, without allowing real evidence to come forth. For instance, they have been propagating this fake evidence of a chemical attack in Douma, in Syria. But there is no real evidence! It’s all camera evidence. Pictures taken by people, shady organizations like the White Helmets, which are in league with Al Qaeda. And people are believing it, because there is no push back in social media against this fake evidence.”

Chris is a heavy equipment operator from Hamilton, Ontario who recently found the *World Socialist Web Site*. Addressing himself to his fellow workers, Chris told a WSWS reporter, “We just need solidarity. We need everybody to be on the same page and have an awakening and understand what’s going on, what’s at stake and what the solution is. That’s the perspective that they have here, the WSWS and the SEP.

“There is urgency. Things are moving. The way they’re going right now I don’t think they’re moving in the direction the working class wants. Nobody wants a big war in Syria or nuclear war, God forbid it goes that way. I’d like to think that the ruling class isn’t stupid enough to do that, but you never know what’s going to happen. We need people to come together to stop that and change things so that society is set up for the betterment of people and not to profit for the few, the oligarchs.”

“The role of the unions is to stop the class struggle and just keep the ball rolling, and that’s what they do and they’re good at it,” Chris said. “I’m lucky in my job that I’m not working for poverty wages and paying union dues, and I have benefits. My kids can go to the doctor whenever they need to, but that’s not the case for everyone, especially in America. I’m lucky in Canada, we’ve got universal healthcare, we have a lot of advantages that you don’t have in the states, but if the ruling class gets their way those will be gone in Canada before too long as well.

“And that’s something that the unions are not doing anything to address. They just say, ‘Go to work every day, pay us your union dues,’ and that’s just the end of it. I’d like my kids to have a better life than I’ve had. If they’re sick I’d like them to be able to go to the doctor

and not be financially ruined for it, and everybody should have that option, not just me in Canada.”

Chris explained that he believed that the resurgence of the class struggle required an internationalist perspective. “It has to be a global struggle, because the corporations and the businesses are all global. You can’t fight that from country to country, because the unions just want me to line up behind the companies in my area. And they’ll just shut down and move to Mexico, like what happened to my dad’s company, so that’s why it has to be an international struggle—because you’re fighting something international so you need a solution that’s international. Otherwise, it’s just not going to happen. It’s a race to the bottom. That’s just the corporate system.”

Jake is from the Toronto area, where he is studying to be a teacher. He has read the WSWS for seven years. “I came down because I thought it would be really important to hear the perspective that’s being shared and to get more active and involved in building the IYSSE and SEP. I hope we can build a strong chapter of the SEP in Canada to intervene in the struggles of the working class there, offer them a socialist and internationalist perspective there and to unite with workers in the US.

“I’m student and have worked as a teacher, so seeing the struggles they have engaged in in Oklahoma, West Virginia, Detroit, Kentucky, and Arizona, has been inspiring. There have been tons of betrayals of teachers struggles since I moved to Ontario in June last year. I’ve seen big struggles by teachers on contract who were on strike, 80 percent of the teachers on precarious contracts. They’re making maybe \$30,000, in a city like Toronto. There’s a big worry about the future of education and if there will be any jobs.

“The opening lecture by Joseph Kishore was really good. I think there were some powerful statements by workers and teachers. I was moved. The truth is really powerful. This is a fight for everybody. This is a fight for the working class and the future. There’s no better time to start than now.”



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