

SEP and IYSSE hold meeting on war, the class struggle and the fight against Internet censorship

By our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a meeting at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan yesterday on the growth of working-class struggle and the ruling class's drive to censor the Internet.

The meeting was attended by more than 75 people, including students from four universities across the state, autoworkers in Detroit and Flint, and workers from Ontario, Canada who drove across the border to attend. Four Detroit teachers also attended the meeting, amidst an expanding wave of teacher strikes across the United States and internationally.

Shemeeka Hennings, the mother of Jacoby Hennings, the 21-year-old Ford worker who died in still-unknown circumstances in the offices of the United Auto Workers union at Ford's Woodhaven Stamping Plant on October 20, 2017, attended and addressed the meeting.

Opening the meeting, SEP National Secretary Joseph Kishore noted that it was taking place under conditions of a rapidly escalating political, geopolitical and social crisis of American and world capitalism.

A bitter factional conflict was taking place in Washington, he noted, with Trump's opponents expressing differences within the ruling class "over issues of foreign policy, centered on demands for more aggressive actions in Syria and Russia." Kishore stated that the Trump administration's bombing of Syria was a fulfillment of these demands but had been "followed by calls in the US and European media for a further escalation of regime-change operations in Syria," posing the immediate danger of a large-scale war with Russia.

Kishore quoted from the SEP statement of June 2017, "Palace Coup or Class Struggle: The Political Crisis in Washington and the Strategy of the Working Class," which predicted that an "altogether different conflict is developing—between the ruling class and the working class, the broad mass of the population, which is suffering various

forms of social distress and is completely excluded from political life." In 2018, he said, this conflict has "burst into the open."

Kishore reviewed the objective growth of the class struggle on an international scale and in the US. "Everywhere," he said, "workers confront the same basic conditions: a political system that is moving rapidly to the right, a ruling class that is determined to organize a further transfer of wealth, trade unions that function as instruments of the state and the corporations." The development of the class struggle "has brought workers into increasingly direct conflict with the trade unions."

He said: "The overriding task is to build a revolutionary leadership, systematically, consciously and aggressively. It is on this task that a progressive resolution to the basic question facing mankind—socialism or barbarism—depends."

Kishore's opening remarks were followed by a series of reports by SEP and IYSSE members. Niles Niemuth, who this month traveled with WSWs Labor Editor Jerry White to intervene in and provide coverage on the Oklahoma teachers' strike, reviewed the political lessons of the strike. He pointed to the connection between the ruling elite's censorship of the Internet and its fears over workers' use of social media to communicate and organize independently of the trade unions.

Andre Damon reviewed the development of the Internet censorship drive in the wake of the election of Donald Trump in 2016, and the campaign by the Democratic Party and intelligence agencies to ascribe all political opposition within the US to the work of Russian "fake news."

WSWS Labor Editor Jerry White, who has written on the demands for an investigation into the death of Jacoby Hennings, introduced Shemeeka Hennings to the meeting, and called for a moment of silence in memory of her son.

Shemeeka delivered the following remarks:

“I haven’t had any strength since the worst day of my life, October 20th, 2017. But when it comes to your children, there is no such thing as no strength. Especially when you’re fighting to protect them.

“I want to thank the WSWs for stepping in when they were slandering my baby and making up all the fake news about him, and bringing out an article to show that there are a lot of questions that are not answered, that need to be answered. Nobody understands. No union person yet has called, come up to me personally, to say, ‘I’m sorry.’ No one even came to his funeral from Ford, to shake our hand and say, ‘sorry for your loss.’ How can they sleep at night?

“I have been at Chrysler for 20 years and it’s a struggle for me to go to work still. And I’m a senior employee there. So just imagine a temporary worker going to work every single day. I work with temp employees and I see how they get treated. I want to say, we need to start coming, period, together as a working class. Until we come together, nothing is going to change. We already know where the union is. Thank you.”

Shemeeka’s remarks were met with a standing ovation from the audience.

A lively discussion followed, with numerous workers making contributions that expressed a broader growth in working class consciousness and growing hostility to the trade unions and both Democratic and Republican parties.

Gladyes, a retired GM autoworker from Flint, Michigan who has been at the forefront of residents’ fight to expose the poisoning of the city’s water supply by state, local and federal authorities, spoke. She denounced the efforts by the Democratic Party to divide Flint residents along racial lines by arguing that the poisoning of the city’s water was a racial issue.

“They have continued to make this about race,” Gladyes said. “Fifty-four percent of Flint is black. This is not about color. This is about the working class and capitalism. To these people who think they’ll get a better hand deal from the Democrats than the Republicans, you’re so wrong. They’re all in this together. They’ve got their foot on the neck of the working class.

Don’t buy into this. Stand up and say you’ve had enough of capitalism. You’ve had enough of the Democrats and Republicans. They don’t care about the workers, and neither does the UAW.”

Chris, a 37-year-old machine operator in Ontario, Canada attending his first SEP meeting, also spoke from the floor. He explained how he had become aware of the ruling

class’s censorship of the Internet. “I have only started reading WSWs articles for a few months,” he said. “I originally read a lot of Global Research. I had a Google newsfeed, one of whose headlines was for Global Research. What used to put up all their articles in that newsfeed is now pulling up nothing. It’s all mainstream news.”

“I want to make a point about how capitalism has affected me,” he continued. “My father worked for a company called Campco in Hamilton. In 1998 they decided to shut down and ship production over to Mexico. They reduced pensions, so he lost a good portion of his pension, and he was forced for the rest of his life to be a greeter and work at Walmart, to make ends meet. He did that for six years and had a heart attack and died. I think a big part in his death was the stress from that.”

“That’s the capitalist system. When he passed away, he still had some debt. So my brother and I had to pay it off so the bank wouldn’t take away our mother’s house. That’s what we have to stop, because nobody should be put in that position.”

The meeting also heard several other reports and contributions from SEP and IYSSE members. Eric London reported on the immense growth of social inequality in the United States and around the world and explained how the oligarchic character of economic life in every country was driving the ruling class’s turn to authoritarianism. IYSSE National Committee member Genevieve Leigh spoke about the significance of the mass protests of young people in the US and the social conditions facing youth. She outlined the IYSSE’s perspective for turning students and youth to the building of a revolutionary party of the working class.

Following the meeting, many workers stayed behind for further discussion and to purchase literature. A report on the comments by workers made to WSWs reporters will be published tomorrow.

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