

SEP speaks to workers in Anaheim about election campaign and police violence

A campaign team
7 August 2012

A team of campaigners for the Socialist Equality Party spoke to workers in Anaheim, California over the weekend about recent police violence in the city. They distributed copies of SEP presidential candidate Jerry White's statement "Police violence in Anaheim: the class issues" and talked about the program of the SEP election campaign.

On July 21, police shot and killed 25-year-old Manuel Diaz, who was unarmed. This was followed by the use of tear gas, rubber bullets and a police dog against protesters in the neighborhood. Less than a day later, police shot and killed 21-year-old Joel Acevedo.

The killings and the eruption of opposition have exposed the deep social divide in Anaheim—and indeed throughout California and across the US. The growth of social inequality and the attack on the working class has been accompanied by an escalation of police violence and repression.

Workers and young people in Anaheim are overwhelmingly opposed to the police killings. They also expressed anger at the economic situation and opposition to the entire political establishment.

Ramon Chavez is a cook who has lived in Anaheim for 20 years. "The police are bad all the time. They stop you for nothing. I know a lot of people that this has happened to. But I think this is the worst it's ever been."

About the local economy, Ramon said, "Unemployment is very high. There just aren't a lot of jobs right now, and the government is not helping us." He added, "I understand that the Republicans and Democrats are going to cut Social Security. We paid into it, but they're saying that there will be nothing for the young people. That's not right."

Jose Nieves Morales is a cross-country truck driver for Allied Van Lines, originally from Mexico. "The police do cause a lot of problems here. One of my neighbors down the street was stopped for a traffic ticket. When he went to pay it, he also got deported to Mexico.

Asked about what he thought of the actions of the Obama administration, Jose said, "Too much talk. He promised amnesty for the 'illegals,' but he's deported more people than Bush did. There used to be many Mexican people moving to America, but now a lot of them are going back to Mexico because of the discrimination here."

Alex Lopez studies graphic design at Westwood College, a trade school. "I think it was pretty horrible what the police did, that it went to that extreme. I passed by there, and there were mostly young kids."

Campaigners pointed to the statement by White, which explained that police violence was directed at the working class as a whole. Several groups have intervened in the protests in Anaheim to insist that the fundamental issue is race, and that police violence is about enforcing racial segregation.

Alex said, "It really wasn't racial because a few months ago the cops in Fullerton [also in Orange County] beat Kelly Thomas to death, and he was a white homeless man. I was reading the *OC Weekly* about that killing and tried to picture in my head what the officers were saying and doing. Is that the law? Is that what they do?"

After SEP supporters discussed the party's program in the elections, Alex said, "Obama and Romney are the same. They both say one thing to the people. But after the elections, whoever gets elected will do something else and forget their promises."

Pancho also referred to Thomas. "Those cops are out of their minds. The whole time the man was screaming for the police to leave him alone. They use the badge to kill people. I've heard people say we are in a free country. I don't think so. To be illegal is a criminal act. I, like many, came to this country looking for work to feed my family, to make a living. Then I hear people trying to tie me up with criminals. Why? All I do is

work.”

Pancho expressed confused anger over the social programs. He spoke of lazy youth that simply abuse welfare. Campaigners responded by explaining the disastrous economic conditions facing the vast majority of workers, and the lack of jobs. Responding to these points, Pancho noted that the retirement age is also being increased. “All the people that have worked their whole lives deserve to live like kings when they retire,” he said.

When asked about the presidential elections, Pancho said, “They’re a bunch of rats. All of those politicians are a mafia willing to do whatever it takes to line their pockets with money.” When asked where the solution lies for the working class, Pancho responded, “Another revolution.”

Rose, a quality control inspector for a pharmaceutical company, is originally from Kenya. “It’s a crazy world! That’s what I was thinking when we were watching the news and saw what the police did. It was very scary, and we are right behind Disneyland.”

Rose described her first impression of the US, “To tell you the truth, we used to think that America was the best place to live. We came here from Kenya three years ago because we believed that. Yes, it’s the place where Obama’s family comes from! In Kenya right now, people are afraid to open their doors for fear of being beaten by criminals or thugs.”

She added, “We thought that everybody here has rights, and that America has the best things. But with these events, you feel like you’re not safe, not secure. You start thinking, am I next?”

Juana Seituno said, “The police have the power to do what they want. They don’t listen to reason. I have my work truck here, and the police officer is always harassing me telling me to move. I tell them ‘Hey I’m just working, why can’t you just let me work?’”

“The police are part of the government,” Juana said. “They like to do the easy job and come bother me while I work, why is it always they’re here after the poor?”

When asked about the presidential election Juana responded, “Both candidates are the same. What did Obama say? He promised to assist with amnesty, and now we have more deportations than before. His parents were workers but that didn’t seem to make a difference. What we really want is a president that fulfills the promises they make. All they want is the vote.”

Campaigners explained the position of the SEP that workers should have the right to live wherever they chose. Juana asked what was the guarantee that the SEP gives to fulfill these promises. The campaigners explained that the SEP campaign was not a conventional campaign. The interests of the working class could only be defended through its independent political mobilization with the aim of taking state power. The purpose of the SEP campaign was to give a voice to workers and unite them under a socialist program.

George Nichols said, “The police have a mentality of shoot first ask questions later. It’s dangerous with the police here. They are always hiding around. If I step out of my house with a stick in order to defend my house, it might be the police creeping around. They might see me as a threat and shoot me. That happened to a friend of mine around the corner.”

“The police are taught to go through certain procedures—they seem to ignore them. Just because a person runs isn’t a reason to kill him. The people getting shot could be my neighbors, they run when they see the police.”

Gary Abernathy spoke of the fear of his sons encountering the police for a traffic violation since they are about to be licensed to drive. “I told my sons that if the police pull you over, make sure you have your hands up where they can see them. The most important thing is to make sure you don’t get shot, keep your registration out on the dash and not in the glove box so they don’t think you’re going for a gun.”

In response to questions about the upcoming elections Gary said, “Every time a new president comes we hear of change and then they are voted in and nothing happens—they just say what they need to in order to get into office.”

For more information on the SEP campaign and to get involved, visit socialequality.com.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact