

SEP campaign wins support in Cincinnati, Ohio

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Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party gathered hundreds of signatures in Cincinnati, Ohio, last weekend to place David Lawrence, the party's candidate for the US House of Representatives, on the ballot in the First Congressional District of Ohio.

David Lawrence, 37, teaches at a public high school in Dayton and is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati. He is also the son of Jim Lawrence, the vice-presidential running mate of SEP presidential candidate Bill Van Auken.

On the first weekend of the campaign supporters gathered nearly 600 signatures out of the 1,695 required to gain ballot access. Campaigners intend to gather at least 2,500 signatures in order to sustain any challenge by the authorities. At the same time the SEP is preparing legal action to overturn Ohio's undemocratic ballot restrictions, including the March 1 filing deadline for independent congressional candidates.

Workers and college students responded enthusiastically to the SEP campaign and particularly to the party's demand for the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. At the University of Cincinnati and in working class neighborhoods many people who signed petitions said they had friends and relatives who were US soldiers in Iraq and were angered by the statements by John Kerry—the presumptive presidential nominee for the Democrats—that he would continue the occupation if elected.

One student, who signed the petition and offered to help the SEP candidate get on the ballot, commented on Kerry's visit to the University of Cincinnati the week before. "Kerry was here. I was not interested in seeing him. He's tongue-tied about the war. It will be a big fight, but I agree that working people need their own party."

"This is a senseless war. It's for oil," a worker said

as she was signing the petition. "We are going to pay for it for the next 50 years. New York and California are broke, people are losing jobs, and Mr. Corporate America is shifting more jobs overseas. I go to the Internet and read lots of international papers because the media in the US only tell you what they want you to hear."

The First Congressional District encompasses most of Cincinnati—a city of 331,000 people—and much of the surrounding suburbs in Hamilton and Butler counties. Like America as a whole the metropolitan Cincinnati area is characterized by severe social and economic polarization.

The city is home to some of the richest Fortune 500 companies, such as Procter & Gamble, Kroger's, Chiquita Brands International and Federated Department Stores. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, residents of Ohio's 45243 ZIP Code, an enclave of million dollar homes in Indian Hills and other suburbs on Cincinnati's eastern edge, have given more money to Bush than any other area in the state and second only, on the national level, to the 10021 ZIP Code on Manhattan's upper east side.

The incumbent in the First District is five-term Congressman Steve Chabot, a right-wing Republican who was a House Manager during the impeachment of Bill Clinton and currently serves as the vice chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Middle East. Bush chose Cincinnati as the venue for his October 2002 speech, where he outlined the lies used to launch the war against Iraq.

Cincinnati also includes a large working class population and many layers of professionals and middle class people outraged over the war in Iraq, the attack on democratic rights and corporate downsizing. Cincinnati also includes some of the most impoverished inner-city

neighborhoods in America. One study said the economic disparity between the richest 5 percent of the population in the Cincinnati area and the poorest 5 percent is second only to the Tampa Bay, Florida area, the worst in the country.

In April 2001 rioting erupted in several minority neighborhoods following the police killing of Timothy Thomas, an unarmed teenager and the fifteenth black male killed by police over a span of six years. Officials placed the city under a state of emergency, imposed a dawn-to-dusk curfew and dispatched hundreds of police officers and state troopers to suppress the riot. By the time the violence was over scores of people were hospitalized, widespread damage had been done to storefronts and businesses and more than 800 people were jailed for rioting, looting and curfew violations.

Despite promises from corporate executives and city officials that the chronic problems of police brutality and poverty would be addressed, matters have only gotten worse over the last three years. Since March 2001 Ohio has lost 223,700 jobs, some 4 percent of the total jobs in the state. The police killing of 41-year-old Nathaniel Jones last December—a beating by six cops captured on a police videotape—underscores the fact that police brutality continues unabated.

Throughout the day of campaigning David Lawrence explained that the SEP was fighting to mobilize the working class against the two big business parties and their policies of war and attacks on democratic rights and living standards.

One young electrician who signed the petition said, “Inequality and poverty caused the riots in 2001. Nothing has changed since then. You see the way blacks are treated by police with the case of Nathaniel Jones. The same police chief is in there who keeps saying the cops are good.

“Bush is spending \$86 billion for Iraq when schools are falling apart and people are scraping by on \$6 an hour. It’s time for working people—black and white—to fight for our own interests.”

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