

Socialist Equality Party files petitions for Michigan congressional candidate

E. Galen
16 July 2004

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party have completed a successful petition drive to place Jerry White on the ballot as an independent congressional candidate in the 15th Congressional District of Michigan. The SEP filed petitions July 14 at the secretary of state's office in Lansing, the state capital, carrying more than 4,500 signatures of Michigan voters, far more than the 3,000 required for ballot status.

The secretary of state's office checks the signatures, verifying the signers are registered to vote, and then makes a recommendation on ballot status to the state Board of Elections at a hearing sometime next month.

The SEP collected the signatures in a two-month petition drive which mobilized dozens of supporters. The 15th Congressional District encompasses the southeastern corner of the state, including all of Monroe County, the cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti in Washtenaw County, and the southwestern portion of Wayne County, including the Detroit suburbs of Romulus, Taylor, Inkster, Woodhaven, Flat Rock, part of Dearborn (headquarters of Ford Motor Company) and Dearborn Heights.

The district includes a half dozen major auto plants, most of them owned by Ford. The other major employers include the University of Michigan and its Medical Center, the Detroit-Wayne County Metropolitan Airport, auto parts giant Masco, and Detroit Edison, which operates several huge power plants near Monroe.

The campaign received strong support among students at the two major college campuses in the district—the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti—as well as at several community college campuses: Washtenaw County Community College, Wayne County

Community College, Henry Ford Community College, Monroe County Community College.

The bulk of the signatures were collected in Ann Arbor, the most populous city in the district, but hundreds signed the petition in Monroe, an old industrial city 15 miles north of Toledo, Ohio, in Ypsilanti, home to several large auto plants, and in working class Detroit suburbs like Taylor and Inkster. The latter city includes the largest concentration of black workers and youth in the district, and some of the most difficult social conditions.

Campaign supporters went to downtown shopping areas, malls, grocery stores, credit unions and drugstores, as well as gathering places on college campuses, the farmers' market in Ann Arbor, and the local Top of the Park summer festival. They won a particularly strong response from theatergoers at showings of Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

The central issue for many of those who signed the SEP petition to place Jerry White on the ballot was the war in Iraq. Many of those who signed were enraged by the pro-war posture of the Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, which is backed by the local Democratic Congressman John Dingell.

SEP supporters encountered passionate opposition to the war in Iraq, not only in traditionally liberal and antiwar areas like Ann Arbor, but in the working class suburbs and cities where they campaigned. The intensity of this feeling was expressed not only in ready agreement to sign a petition to place a socialist antiwar candidate on the ballot, but in contributions on the spot which totaled hundreds of dollars in the course of the petition drive.

The other major issue voiced by those who signed the SEP petition was the question of social equality. The SEP campaign continually met people whose life

experiences were not of the economic recovery trumpeted in the media, but of continued insecurity, urban blight, cutbacks and recession. Social workers reported an ongoing decline in conditions of poverty and neglect. Factory workers described speedup and layoffs. Highly skilled engineers told how they had been laid off and forced to take \$7-an-hour jobs.

One sentiment frequently voiced during the campaign was distrust of the government—particularly Bush’s pronouncements on the “war on terror”—and distrust of the media. Petition-gatherers met people who were reading the *World Socialist Web Site* or who knew the SEP and WSWS from their participation in antiwar demonstrations over the past two years.

The SEP candidate, Jerry White, 45, has been a member of the socialist movement for 25 years, joining in New York City where he was a worker at United Parcel Service and a member of the Teamsters union. He has been a congressional candidate in the same district for the Workers League, predecessor of the SEP, and was the SEP’s presidential candidate in 1996.

Jerry White’s principal opponent, incumbent Democrat John Dingell, is the longest-serving member of the House of Representatives, having held the seat for nearly 50 years. (His father was the congressman for two decades before that). He faces no serious Republican opposition in a heavily Democratic district, but Dingell’s own political views, particularly his support for the war, are in sharp contrast to the sentiments of the vast majority of the district’s population.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact