

SEP presidential campaign files petitions in Washington state

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25 August 2004

On Monday, August 23, the Socialist Equality Party filed petitions in Washington's state capital, Olympia, to place presidential candidates Bill Van Auken and Jim Lawrence on the Washington state ballot. Nearly 1,500 signatures were gathered between July 11 and August 21, 2004, by SEP members and supporters, marking the first time the SEP will have achieved ballot access in the state. After the validation of our petitions by Washington's secretary of state, Van Auken and Lawrence will appear in voters' guide pamphlets statewide and on the November 2 general election ballot.

Over the past six weeks, petitioning drives were held in several Seattle locations. We received signatures from residents throughout the state—students, nurses, housewives, single mothers, spouses and family of soldiers, and soldiers themselves. In the course of the drive, supporters engaged many signers in serious political discussion on the elections. In the process, it became clear that among a certain section of working people support for John Kerry and the Democrats is paper-thin, with many expressing a disdain for both big business candidates. Indeed, Kerry's main "appeal" appears to be that he is not George W. Bush. Public disgust about the war in Iraq is widespread, despite the lack of any outlet in the political or media mainstream.

Youth and working people were most enthusiastic about our effort to gain ballot status, with many willing to sign on the basis of democratic principle, as well as the need to have a party opposed to the war on the ballot.

With living costs, especially for housing and health care, rising dramatically in the area, many have seen their living standards decline. Washington state's unemployment rate is currently at 6 percent, above the national average. Several signers expressed anger over

the growth of inequality and drew connections between the lack of political choices and the growing discord of the majority of the population.

The support won for the campaign to place the SEP candidates on the Washington ballot demonstrates the striving of working people to find representation in the present-day political milieu.

While some were often initially opposed to our campaign on the grounds that any third-party candidate might "split the vote," the petitioners' arguments convinced many to sign. One young woman, a Kerry supporter but opposed to the war in Iraq, at first refused to sign. An SEP member explained that whether Kerry or Bush wins in November the prosecution of the war will continue. After the woman was urged to "snap out of it" and to look more critically at the political situation, she was initially taken aback by such a frank appeal. In the end, however, she not only signed but thanked the SEP campaigner for "giving such strong and straightforward arguments."

The completion of petitioning is only the start of our campaign. Between now and November, we call on our Washington state readers to help us distribute copies of our election statement, and to invite Bill Van Auken and Jim Lawrence to speak at schools, universities, workplaces or before community organizations. Contribute financially to our campaign and help build the SEP as the new political party of the working people.



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