

SEP candidate in Maine thanks voters and supporters

15 November 2004

Carl Cooley, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate in Maine's 2nd Congressional District in the recent US elections, has issued the following statement to his supporters.

I want to thank the many thousands of Maine voters who cast ballots for a socialist candidate, and especially to thank and to congratulate all of the SEP members and supporters who worked so hard to make our effort in Maine a success. We showed that a socialist program could not only win a hearing, but also win important support among a cross-section of working people in the small cities, towns and rural areas of eastern Maine.

The SEP won 8,387 votes in the 2nd Congressional District, 3 percent of the vote total. This was a remarkable vote for the first socialist candidate for Congress ever to run in this state.

The vote was the outcome and culmination of months of important political work. First we had to obtain the signatures of 2,000 registered voters. Dozens of supporters contributed to this effort. The petitioning was grueling work, but also satisfying, because of the opportunity it gave us to connect with ordinary working people. We collected 3,200 signatures, just to be sure. The 2nd District is a vast area with many, many small towns, each of which had to have its own petition sheet for each petition gatherer. We were thrown out of many shopping malls on the specious grounds of "private property," but we made it.

Everywhere we found tremendous concern about the illegal war in Iraq, and support for our demand that US troops be withdrawn immediately. Thousands of soldiers and national guard reservists from Maine—many of whom are working class youth who joined only because they faced little or no future here—have been sent to Iraq. At least 14 have been killed so far and scores more have been maimed and psychologically damaged.

Our campaigners distributed thousands of leaflets and nearly 1,000 copies of the SEP Election Platform. I was able to participate in a televised debate that demonstrated the essential agreement of both the Democratic and Republican candidates in support of the war and the attacks on the living standards of the working class here in Maine and throughout the country. The incumbent Democratic congressman, Michael Michaud, could only repeat Kerry's claim that he would prosecute the war against the Iraqi people in a more successful fashion. He was silent on the economic and social devastation facing working people.

In addition to that debate, I participated in a debate at the Fort Kent campus of the University of Maine, and I was interviewed by newspapers throughout the state. We closed the campaign with an important public meeting in Bangor, also a first for the Socialist Equality Party in this part of the country.

I know I am speaking for all of our campaigners when I say that we are not at all surprised by the outcome of the election. We know that Bush was able to win a narrow victory because, in the most fundamental sense, he was unopposed. The Democratic Party demonstrated its complete bankruptcy and its complicity in the assault on basic democratic rights. Kerry said this was the most important election in decades, but he was unable to articulate any fundamental differences between himself and Bush.

Because the Democratic Party defends capitalism too it was unwilling and incapable of appealing to wide layers of working people in the small towns and rural areas of the South, the Great Plains and other regions of the country, which are being hit hard by plant closings, small business bankruptcies and the farm crisis. Kerry did not even bother to campaign in several states in the South and ceded the vote to the Republicans who sought to divert social anger over economic insecurity

behind such issues as terrorism, gay marriage and abortion.

Throughout my campaign we repeatedly made the point that the right to universal health care, free education through college and guaranteed well-paying jobs was all possible, but its attainment was being blocked by the two big business parties and the drive by the multinational corporations for ever greater amounts of profit. To fight for a better life, we insisted, the working class had to break free from these two parties and advance an international and socialist solution to the crisis produced by capitalism. The support we won for this perspective demonstrated the potential for the powerful unity of working people, whether they are from the big cities or the small towns and rural areas of Maine, Kansas or Mississippi.

Our campaign showed that, when even a small opportunity is won by us to get our program presented honestly and objectively before thousands of voters, we can win powerful support. I won 5 percent of the vote in Belfast, and similar percentages in other towns. At a “mock debate” held by several Bangor high schools I won the support of nearly 10 percent of the students present.

This is only the beginning, because it is only the result of the limited opportunities we were able to utilize in this campaign. We are confident that many tens of millions of workers will respond to our program—of democracy and social equality, for jobs, education, health care and a peaceful and socialist foreign policy—when they are given a real chance to consider it. The coming struggles will provide these opportunities, and make it possible to establish the political independence of the working class.



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