

Socialist Equality Party gains significant support in US elections

Joseph Kay
4 November 2004

The Socialist Equality Party gained a small but significant level of support in several races it contested in the US elections.

Due to restrictive ballot access laws and the systematic attempts by the Democratic Party to prevent third parties from winning ballot status, the SEP's candidates for President and Vice President were on the ballot in only five states: New Jersey, Iowa, Washington, Minnesota and Colorado. In these states, Bill Van Auken and Jim Lawrence received a preliminary total of 2,088 votes. This figure does not include those who wrote in the candidates' names in states around the country.

In New Jersey, the SEP candidates received a preliminary total of 972 votes, most of which were concentrated in the heavily working class cities of Camden, Newark and Jersey City. The SEP candidates received a total of 528 votes in Minnesota, 276 votes in Colorado, 161 votes in Iowa and 151 votes in the state of Washington.

Carl Cooley, the SEP candidate for the US House of Representatives in Maine's 2nd Congressional District, polled a preliminary total of 8,218 votes, with 96 percent of precincts reporting. This represents 2.5 percent of the votes cast. Cooley was the first socialist ever to run for Congress in Maine.

The 2nd Congressional District includes most of Maine by area, including many small towns and agricultural regions as well as larger cities such as Lewiston and Bangor. Cooley received votes from nearly all of the 394 separate counties. He received 338 votes in Lewiston, formerly a center of textile manufacturing, but now suffering from economic stagnation. In his hometown of Jackson, Cooley received 20 percent of the vote (55 votes) and in the neighboring small town Weston he received 32 percent

of the vote (63 votes).

In the 15th Congressional District of Michigan, Jerry White, the SEP US House of Representatives candidate, received 1,815 votes, or about 1 percent of votes cast. About half of these were obtained in Washtenaw County, which includes the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor as well as the working class city of Ypsilanti. He received 292 votes in Monroe and 670 votes from the parts of Wayne County included in the 15th District.

Tom Mackaman, the SEP candidate for State Representative in the 103rd District of Illinois (including the cities of Champaign and Urbana) won 1,462 votes, or nearly 4 percent of the votes cast. Mackaman received over 5 percent of the vote in several precincts more heavily populated by students, workers and academics, including 8 percent in central Urbana. Significantly, the SEP received substantial support in both predominantly black and white working class precincts, indicating that Mackaman was able to make a successful appeal to the common interests of all working people.

Mackaman waged his campaign in the face of intense opposition from the Democratic Party, which engaged in an anti-democratic attempt to keep him off the ballot. The Democratic candidate Naomi Jakobsson won the election.

Mackaman's campaign received significant coverage in the local news media. On Election Day alone he was interviewed for three separate television programs, and gave six radio and newspaper interviews in the evening.

Results are not yet in for SEP write-in candidates David Lawrence, who ran for US House of Representatives in the 1st Congressional District of Ohio, and John Christopher Burton, who ran for US House of Representatives in the 29th Congressional

District of California.

The relatively small percentage of the vote the SEP received was not surprising, given the limited resources of the party and the enormous hurdles placed in the way of third party campaigns by the two big business parties. As the election platform of the SEP stated, “The purpose of our campaign is to raise the level of political debate within the United States and internationally, to break out of the straitjacket of right-wing bourgeois politics, and present a socialist alternative to the demagoguery and lies of the establishment parties and the mass media. Our campaign is not about votes. It is about ideas and policies.”

The impact of the SEP’s intervention in the elections extended well beyond the number of votes it received. In the course of fighting for ballot access, the party gathered thousands of signatures from individuals opposed to the war and looking for an alternative to the two-party system. This included over 8,000 signatures gathered in the state of Ohio, where Van Auken and Lawrence were ultimately denied ballot access after thousands of registered voters were arbitrarily disqualified from the petitions.

During the course of the campaign, Carl Cooley and Tom Mackaman were able to debate their Democratic and Republican opponents on several occasions, and explain the SEP’s opposition to the war in Iraq, as well as many aspects of the party’s internationalist and socialist program. Thousands of copies of the SEP election platform were distributed by supporters on college campuses, at work locations and in working class neighborhoods.

The SEP held meetings in cities across the country—including in Michigan, Maine, Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio, New York, Washington and California—which drew significant interest.

In the run-up to the election, Van Auken took the perspective of the SEP to an international audience, holding meetings in England and Sri Lanka. The meetings were a concrete expression of the international character of the party’s campaign, which declared that its principal aim was the unification of the working class around the world.

The results of the election are a vindication of the SEP’s perspective. There are no shortcuts to the development of movement opposed to war and social

reaction. A solution to the political, economic and social crisis in the United States and around the world can only be found through the building of a party based on the common interests of the international working class and opposed to the capitalist system. The SEP will continue to fight for this perspective in the aftermath of the election.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact