

Socialist Equality Party announces candidates in New York, Michigan and California

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The Socialist Equality Party is announcing its first three candidates in the 2006 US congressional and statewide elections. In New York state, the party's 2004 presidential candidate, Bill Van Auken, will run for the US Senate seat held by Democrat Hillary Clinton. In Michigan, Jerome White will be the SEP candidate in the 12th congressional district in the Detroit suburbs, opposing 12-term incumbent Democrat Sander Levin. In California, John Burton, the party's gubernatorial candidate in 2003, will run in the 29th congressional district (Pasadena) against incumbent Democrat Adam Schiff.

In launching these campaigns, the SEP is seeking to give voice not only to the intense anger and opposition of millions of working people to the policies of the Bush administration, but also to their disgust with the spinelessness and right-wing policies of the Democratic Party.

The struggle to end the war in Iraq, to stop the assault on democratic rights, to reverse the relentless decline in the living standards of the working class, and to fight the staggering concentration of wealth and power within the corporate and financial oligarchy that rules America requires a break with the two-party system of Republicans and Democrats.

The candidates of the Socialist Equality Party call for the independent political organization of the working class, in opposition to the Republicans, on the basis of socialist policies.

The SEP campaign insists on the necessity for a common struggle of workers in the United States in alliance with workers in every part of the world. There is no national solution to the problems of war, exploitation, unemployment, poverty and attacks on democratic rights. All these problems stem from a central fact: world capitalism subordinates all social, economic and political decisions to the interests of corporate profit and the accumulation of personal wealth by a tiny ruling elite.

The SEP campaign will seek to win support among working people and youth for a program that defends their social and political interests, against the dictates of the profit system. Our aim is not the reform of capitalism, but its replacement with a socialist system in which the economy is organized to serve the needs of working people, not the insatiable greed of corporate executives.

We say:

*** Withdraw all American troops from Iraq and Afghanistan immediately!** The Bush administration launched these wars, using fears of terrorism and lies about weapons of mass destruction, to secure US domination of oil resources and strategic positions in Central Asia and the Middle East.

*** Defend and expand democratic rights!** The SEP demands the revocation of the Patriot Act, the dismantling of the Department of Homeland Security, the shutdown of the Guantanamo concentration camp, and an end to the policy of government lawlessness—kidnapping, detention, torture, even murder—in the name of combating terrorism.

*** Defend jobs, expand social benefits, and raise the living standards of working people and youth!** It is the corporate oligarchy, not working people, who are responsible for the crisis of capitalism, and they should pay the price. Economic security is a basic human right, not a privilege,

and the economy must be reorganized to guarantee all working people decent conditions of life.

*** Fight for social equality!** The SEP calls for the creation of a new economic system in which the vast wealth created by the labor of working people is used to benefit the masses, not a tiny financial aristocracy of the super-rich. The major industries and corporations should be transformed into public utilities under democratic control, with economic resources developed on a planned basis to the benefit of all.

The political independence of the working class

In no other advanced industrialized country is the political monopoly of the corporate elite so ruthlessly maintained as in the United States. There exists immense and deep-rooted opposition in America to the Iraq war and the right-wing domestic policies of the Bush administration. Yet the existing political framework blocks any genuine expression of these mass political sentiments.

More than half the American population, according to one recent poll, supports the impeachment of George W. Bush for the attacks on democratic rights waged in the name of the "war on terror." Yet, when Senator Russ Feingold introduced a resolution this week that was limited to censuring Bush over the illegal NSA domestic spying, the Democratic Party leadership in Congress ran for cover, "cowering," in Feingold's own words, in the face of a deeply unpopular administration.

The prostration of the Democrats before the White House and the congressional Republicans is not, however, merely an expression of political cowardice. The Democratic Party, like the Republican, defends the capitalist system. It functions as a political safety valve for big business, smothering and neutralizing any movement from below that would threaten the interests of the wealthy.

Every Democratic congressman and senator, from liberals like Feingold to rabid defenders of the war in Iraq like Joseph Lieberman, is a political representative of the US ruling elite. The conflicts of the Democrats with the Republicans are disputes within the upper class over how best to advance their predatory interests internationally and maintain their economic and political stranglehold over American society.

There can be no serious struggle within the US and internationally against war, repression and the attacks on living standards and democratic rights without the establishment of the political independence of the working class. American capitalism is hurtling towards catastrophe, not only in Iraq, but within the United States. The deepening social polarization between the financial oligarchy, gorged with wealth, and the great mass of the population, struggling to survive, will find expression in the emergence of a social movement from below of immense proportions.

While seeking to win as many votes as possible, the principal aim of the Socialist Equality Party campaign in 2006 is to raise the political and

social consciousness of working people and youth, and to create the foundations for a class-conscious political and socialist movement capable of leading the working class in the coming social conflicts.

The SEP seeks to mobilize workers, professionals, young people and students in a concentrated, serious and long-term effort to develop a grassroots political movement. This is of necessity diametrically opposed to the cynical mudslinging and demagoguery of the Democratic and Republican parties, whose central political task is to delude masses of working people into giving their votes to the representatives of the super-rich.

The fight for ballot status

A major task of the SEP campaign is to achieve ballot status for our candidates, in the face of reactionary and anti-democratic laws and procedures enforced by our political opponents in the Democratic and Republican parties, which control the electoral machinery and seek to block any challenge, especially from the left.

Despite its incessant preaching of democracy, as a pretext for wars of plunder, the American ruling class maintains the most anti-democratic political system of any major industrialized country. The entire political life of an enormous country of 300 million people is confined to a system of two officially privileged parties, financed both by the state itself and by the wealthy elite—by one estimate, a war chest of \$100 million will be required by 2007 to make a presidential candidate credible in 2008—and accorded virtually exclusive access to the mass media.

US election laws differ widely from state to state, but there is one common feature: the Democrats and Republicans are placed on the ballot automatically in elections at every level from the municipal to the presidential, while third parties seeking ballot status encounter multiple obstacles ranging from excessive signature requirements to arbitrary enforcement of election technicalities.

So undemocratic is the US political system that 11 of the 50 states offer no procedure whatsoever for placing a third party on the ballot in 2006. These are predominantly states in the mid-Atlantic region and Midwest controlled by the Democratic Party, including Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Indiana, Illinois and Iowa. The remaining 39 states demand a combined total of 777,309 signatures and 129,927 registrations for ballot status, on top of frequently onerous organizational requirements.

The state of Minnesota, for instance, a longtime Democratic Party stronghold, requires 141,420 signatures to qualify a third party—a sizeable proportion of the adult population of the state. If such conditions were imposed for entry into some area of commercial activity, any firm already in business would be properly described as a state-protected monopoly. The Democrats and Republicans enjoy such a monopoly in the area of public life—electoral activity—that is supposed to be the most open to competition.

In addition to the scale of the signature gathering, the technical requirements for the petitions—legal language, prescribed type sizes, even color of the paper stock—are frequently manipulated by the Democrats and Republicans, who control the electoral machinery, to exclude third-party opposition, and especially socialist candidates.

In 2004, the Republican-controlled state government in Ohio barred the SEP presidential ticket from the ballot even though the signatures turned in by supporters easily exceeded the 5,000 required. Registrars in many counties, particularly large urban areas controlled by the Democratic Party, arbitrarily disqualified hundreds of valid signatures, an action that the Republican Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell upheld. In Illinois,

the Democrats challenged the petitions filed on behalf of SEP state legislative candidate Tom Mackaman in an ultimately unsuccessful effort to keep him off the ballot.

Because of the prohibitive character of the requirements for party status, the SEP candidates in New York, Michigan and California will seek a place on the ballot as independent candidates, without party affiliation. The signature totals required here are still considerable, but we are confident that with an ambitious and aggressive effort that involves supporters and readers of the *World Socialist Web Site*, our candidates can win ballot status.

New York state requires 15,000 signatures of registered voters, to be collected in a six-week period this summer, with at least 100 signatures from each of 16 separate congressional districts. Getting on the ballot in the 12th CD of Michigan requires at least 3,000 signatures of registered voters who live in parts of Oakland and Macomb counties, just north of Detroit. In California, the requirement for ballot status in the 29th CD is more than 9,000 signatures of registered voters, who must be residents of an area including the cities of Pasadena, Glendale, Burbank and their environs.

The petition drive will unfold in three stages. The petitioning period in Michigan has already opened, with a deadline of completion by July 20. The California signatures must be collected between April 28 and August 11, while the New York signatures must be collected between July 1 and August 15.

Our candidates and their opponents

Bill Van Auken is the SEP candidate for US Senate from New York state. A member of the socialist movement for more than 35 years, Van Auken is a full-time writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* and ran as the SEP candidate for president in 2004.

His principal opponent, Senator Hillary Clinton, personifies the thoroughly reactionary character of the Democratic Party. Her husband's administration finalized the Democrats' repudiation of even the most timid social reforms. This was signaled by the collapse of its health care program in 1994, in which Hillary Clinton played a central role.

The Clinton administration largely embraced the reactionary domestic policies of the congressional Republicans—gutting welfare programs, aiding the accumulation of private wealth through tax cuts, and deregulation to enrich the privileged corporate elite. In its foreign policy, particularly the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo as well as the repeated bombings of Iraq, the Clinton administration pioneered both the propaganda methods and the military techniques employed by the Bush administration.

Since her entry into the Senate, Clinton has accumulated such a right-wing political record—fervent support for the Iraq war and for Israeli oppression of the Palestinians, cozying up to the religious right, financial austerity—that the Republican Party has been unable to recruit a high-profile challenger. Two Republicans abandoned the race, leaving only the former mayor of Yonkers to seek the Republican nomination. Clinton has more opposition from within the Democratic Party, where at least two antiwar candidates are contesting the nomination in the September primary.

Jerome White is the SEP candidate for Congress in Michigan's 12th District, which includes the Detroit suburbs of Southfield, Oak Park, Berkley, Royal Oak, Ferndale, Madison Heights, Hazel Park, Warren, St. Clair Shores and Roseville. This is a largely working class area with a mix of heavy industry and offices.

A member of the SEP and its predecessor, the Workers League, since

1979, White is a member of the WSWs editorial board with extensive experience in the coverage of the American labor movement, particularly of the auto and coal mining industries.

The incumbent congressman in the 12th District is Democrat Sander Levin. In Levin's political career, one can trace the downward trajectory of American liberalism. His longstanding relationship with the bureaucracy of the United Auto Workers is of a politically corrupt character, which serves only to divert any real struggle by workers against the corporations. His liberalism consists only of duplicitous phrases and cynical gestures. Levin voted against the October 2002 resolution that authorized the war in Iraq, but has since supported war spending and opposed setting a deadline for a US withdrawal. Despite his liberal pretensions, Levin voted for the USA Patriot Act in October 2001. Like the UAW bureaucracy, he seeks to divert opposition to the Bush administration's program of economic and social reaction in a chauvinist direction, with appeals to trade protectionism.

John Burton is the SEP candidate in the 29th District of California, which centers on the city of Pasadena and includes all or part of neighboring cities like Glendale, Burbank and Alhambra. A civil rights attorney with a long record of defending victims of police abuse, Burton was the SEP candidate for governor in the 2003 recall election, the first time an SEP candidate achieved ballot status in California.

Burton is running against incumbent Congressman Adam Schiff, one of the leading right wingers in the Democratic Party and a member of the "Blue Dog" caucus of conservative Democrats whose criticism of the Bush administration is focused on demands for deficit reduction and a more effective military policy to win the war in Iraq. He has taken a leading role on national security and counter-terrorism issues for the Democrats, as a co-founder of the Democratic Study Group on National Security and a member of both the House Judiciary and International Relations Committees.

Schiff has introduced resolutions to legalize the Bush administration's detention of "enemy combatants" at Guantanamo Bay and to demand a more aggressive policy toward Iran. A fervent supporter of the war in Iraq, Schiff was one of only five congressmen who attended Bush's invitation-only speech March 13 at George Washington University, where the president delivered the first of a new round of pro-war speeches.

Schiff's outlook is perhaps best demonstrated by a fear-mongering article under his byline that appeared last fall in *The Hill*, a publication devoted to congressional affairs. Under the headline, "A preventable catastrophe," Schiff outlined a scenario involving a nuclear terrorist attack on Washington that kills most congressmen, government officials and the members of the Supreme Court. He forecasted rule by executive order, martial law, a "climate of fear and xenophobia," and "large-scale roundups and deportations of aliens."

Placing these three candidates on the ballot—as well as other candidates whose campaigns will be announced later—will require an aggressive effort to win support among working people and youth. The SEP is appealing to all our supporters and to readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to join the campaign by participating in petition drives, organizing political discussion of the SEP program, and raising funds to finance campaign activities.

The success of this campaign depends, dear readers and supporters, on your support and active involvement. We need and appeal for your help in this effort.

The SEP will be holding political meetings in each of the three areas in coming weeks to lay the basis for the petition drives and the fall election campaign. Our candidates will explain that the struggle to stop the war in Iraq, put an end to American imperialist militarism, defend democratic rights, eradicate poverty and establish social equality requires the building of a new mass political movement, based on a socialist program and perspective. We urge readers of the WSWs to attend these meetings and

participate personally in the election campaign.

To participate in the SEP election campaign, click here. For information on upcoming SEP public meetings in Michigan, New York, Arizona and California, click here.



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