

Join the fight to place Socialist Equality Party on the ballot in Michigan

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1 May 2006

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As the candidate of the Socialist Equality Party for US Congress in Michigan's 12th Congressional District, I urge working people and youth to join the petition drive to place my name on the ballot and provide a socialist alternative to the two big business parties in the November elections.

Working people in the 12th Congressional District (made up of the Oakland and Macomb county suburbs just north of Detroit) have been sharply affected by the two central issues confronting the American people in the 2006 elections—the war in Iraq and the unrelenting attack on workers' jobs and living standards by corporate America.

The war launched by the Bush administration, on the basis of lies, has already cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and nearly 2,500 US soldiers, with countless more left physically and psychologically damaged. Eighty soldiers from Michigan have been killed, including nearly 20 from the Metropolitan Detroit area. The victims in my district include soldiers as young as 19 years old who come from cities like Warren, Hazel Park and Clinton Township, where many are forced to join the military because of the lack of decent jobs.

The latest to die in the area was 23-year-old Army Specialist Andrew Waits, from Oakland County's Waterford Township, who was killed April 13 when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle in Baghdad.

Although opinion polls show a clear majority of Americans want US troops to be pulled out of Iraq, my opponent in the election, 12-term Democratic Congressman Sander Levin, has done nothing to stop this illegal war. After first voting against the invasion, Levin has since voted to fund the occupation and has opposed setting any date for the withdrawal of US troops. He also voted for the Patriot Act, which paved the way for the Bush administration to spy on US citizens and conduct other attacks on civil liberties.

The Democrats have acted as Bush's accomplices because they defend America's corporate elite, just like the Republicans. The war against Iraq and future wars being prepared against Iran are aimed at establishing US dominance over the oil-rich Middle East.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the immediate withdrawal of all US troops and the prosecution of all those responsible for this illegal war. We demand the US government pay full compensation to the Iraqi people for the destruction of their country and to the families of US soldiers killed and injured by the

war.

The same corporate interests behind the Iraq war—Big Oil, the auto industry, and Wall Street—are also responsible for the economic distress confronting working people in the district.

Corporations like GM, Ford and Delphi insist that younger workers will never attain the wage levels, job protections, pensions or lifetime medical benefits that their parents won through decades of struggle. Even a college degree and professional skills are no longer any guarantee of a secure and decent-paying job, as was made clear when GM recently eliminated the jobs of hundreds of engineers and other white collar workers at the Tech Center in Warren.

The last decade has seen the devastation of many working class communities in the 12th Congressional District. In Macomb County, alone, more than 27,000 factory jobs—or 22 percent of the manufacturing work force—have been wiped out since 2000.

A recent study documents the impact of corporate downsizing. Over the last four years, for example, the number of people receiving public assistance in Macomb County rose 76 percent, while food assistance jumped 99 percent. Rising unemployment, bankruptcies, cuts in wages and working hours and the lack of health insurance have all led to the shrinkage of what used to be known as the blue collar “middle class.”

The official poverty rate in the county has jumped 20 percent since 1999. But this figure conceals the real extent of the crisis because the government claims that an income of \$18,850 is enough to keep a family of four out of poverty. In reality a family needs at least \$38,532 a year, or \$19.27 an hour for a full-time job, to meet basic needs.

Throughout the county, families earning far less are missing meals due to a lack of food, have been evicted from their apartments, or are being forced to postpone health care or surgery because of the out-of-pocket costs. While minorities in the county have higher poverty rates, the report noted the gap between whites and blacks was shrinking.

Over the last two years, the number of home foreclosures in Macomb and Oakland counties has more than doubled, while the percentage of homes seized by the banks throughout Michigan is more than two-and-a-half times the national average. Hundreds of “For Sale” signs sit in front of homes in my district and many homeowners face the prospect of never being able to recover what they owe on their homes. At the same time multi-million-dollar tax breaks given to big business by the Democrats and Republicans

have resulted in a greater tax burden on working and retired homeowners, while public services, including education, face regular cutbacks.

Once again, my opponent Sander Levin has done nothing to oppose these conditions. First elected to Congress in 1982, Levin has established close ties with the auto bosses and the United Auto Workers union. The Democrats' alliance with the union bureaucracy has long been used to prevent working people from building an independent political movement to defend their own interests against the profit system.

Levin and the UAW promote the lie that the destruction of jobs and living standards of American autoworkers is not the product of the capitalism but the fault of workers in Japan, Mexico and other countries. By promoting protectionist trade measures against China, Japan and Europe, the Democrats and the union bureaucracy have sought to divide American autoworkers from their class brothers and sisters throughout the world. Such a road can only lead to future wars, as the US battles its European and Asian rivals for control of markets, raw materials like oil and access to cheap labor.

The SEP fights for the international unity of the working class. Workers in every country are confronting the same transnational corporations and they can only defend their jobs and living standards through a common fight for socialism. A decent-paying job, safe working conditions, quality education, affordable housing and health care must be social rights for all working people.

Workers today produce more wealth than ever before. As a society it should therefore be easier to guarantee such basic needs to everyone. But under capitalism, the wealth created by working people is monopolized by the wealthy few. To guarantee a future free from war, inequality, and poverty, economic life must be reorganized to meet the needs of the working people.

The massive industries can no longer be the personal assets of a handful of multi-millionaires and billionaires. They must be turned into public enterprises under the democratic control of the working class in order to meet the needs of society as a whole. Working people must establish control over all business decisions affecting work, safety, hiring, and hours and have the right to ratify the selection of all managers.

To fight for this socialist program, the working class must build a powerful political movement against the Democrats and Republicans and the profit system they defend. That is the aim of the SEP campaign in the 2006 elections.

Because America's ruling elite understands that the slightest crack in its political monopoly will open the floodgates for mass opposition to its reactionary policies the Democrats and Republicans are desperate to keep third party candidates, and, in particular, socialists from getting on the ballot.

The SEP must gather 3,000 signatures of registered voters before July 20. In practice this means we must gather at least 5,000 signatures because the Democrats and Republicans who control the local election boards often use every technicality possible to disqualify signatures.

Despite these obstacles SEP supporters have received an enthusiastic response to our petition campaign. The wrenching and rapid political experiences over the last two years—from the

debacle in Iraq, to the exposure of government spying and torture, to Hurricane Katrina and rising gas prices—have made many more people receptive to the program of the SEP

During a campaign at Macomb Community College, for example, a student and former Marine who was wounded in combat in Ramadi, Iraq, stopped and signed the petition. In addition to his concern about the war, he said several of his friends work at Delphi, the bankrupt auto parts company that is wiping out 24,000 jobs and demanding a wage cut from \$27 an hour to \$12.50.

Another young worker who delivers supplies to Beaumont Hospital, one of the largest employers in the district, signed the petition and said, "Bush keeps saying the economy is getting better. Well maybe his economy is getting better, not mine."

Across the street from GM's Technical Center, campaigners also won a warm response. Mike, a young cook from Warren, said, "Lot's of my friends are over in Iraq and they're not very happy being there. They went in headstrong about the war, but now they're saying 'What's the point of being there when the people are trying to kill us?' They are literally guarding oil fields. If this was about 'liberating' Iraq, why are they protecting oil fields?"

"I was huge for this war when it started too. But it's turning into another Vietnam. The media has enormous power to manipulate public opinion. The press just prints things to fool the people, like the business about weapons of mass destruction. It's all about the corporations and the almighty dollar.

"The ExxonMobil CEO is getting hundreds of millions of dollars, somewhere like \$145,000 a day. Instead of giving the big boys such money, they should lower the gas prices. I'm making the minimum wage, and I can hardly afford to drive my car to my job.

"My friends and I have concluded that the corporations are controlling everything—including the politicians—and that it is time we start fighting back."

These remarks express the sentiments of growing numbers of workers and youth. The SEP campaign will give voice to the popular opposition to war and inequality and provide a conscious political direction for such a struggle. I appeal to all who support such a fight to join our campaign to provide a socialist alternative to the two-party system.



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