

SEP Senate candidate Bill Van Auken addresses antiwar meeting in New York

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US Senate from New York, Bill Van Auken, spoke Sunday night to an antiwar meeting attended by several hundred people in New York City. The meeting, co-sponsored by New York Peace Action and US Tour of Duty, featured speeches by Scott Ritter, the former Marine intelligence officer and United Nations weapons inspector, and Ray McGovern, the former CIA intelligence officer, both outspoken critics of the war. Also speaking was Jeff Cohen, the founder of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), the media watchdog group.

Organizers had announced that they were inviting all candidates for the US Senate from New York to participate, and the stage featured an empty chair for the incumbent, pro-war Democrat Hillary Clinton. In addition to Van Auken, Jonathan Tasini, Clinton's challenger in the Democratic primary, and Green Party candidate Howie Hawkins addressed the meeting.

Initially, organizers had insisted that Van Auken speak last and from the floor of the hall, claiming that he did not meet the criteria set by the League of Women Voters (LWV) for candidate debates. The SEP pointed out that this method differed little from Hillary Clinton's own refusal to debate Tasini and the decision by New York—the city's Time Warner-owned television news channel—not to hold any debate on the grounds that the challenger had failed to raise more than \$500,000.

The SEP and Van Auken, moreover, had met precisely the same criteria as Hawkins, the Green candidate, who is running a campaign that praises Tasini and offers the Greens as "Plan B" for Democrats after that party's September primary. That is, the SEP submitted tens of thousands of signatures of New York voters to obtain a spot on the November ballot. In any case, the LWV has no set criteria for candidate debates, leaving it to local board discretion, but suggests the inclusion of all candidates who "meet all New York State election law requirements to be on the ballot."

When Van Auken was introduced from the floor of the hall, large sections of the audience, clearly opposed to this undemocratic procedure, began shouting "let him speak from the podium," "go up to the podium," and the organizers relented.

In his remarks, Ray McGovern, the former CIA agent,

denounced the Bush administration's "corruption of intelligence" in the run-up to the Iraq war, describing it as both "a blow to our profession" and an attack on the constitutional framework, by using phony intelligence to "deceive our elected representatives." He advocated opening talks with the Iraqi resistance and seeking the aid of Europe, the Arab League and others to help organize a US withdrawal from Iraq.

Scott Ritter, the ex-weapons inspector, spoke on the danger of a new war against Iran, saying that both Republicans and Democrats were pushing for such a war as a means of recouping the losses suffered in Iraq and Lebanon. Such a war, he predicted, is inevitable "unless we find a way to reinvigorate Congress, get Congress to act in accordance with the Constitution."

Ritter dismissed polls showing 62 percent of Americans against the war in Iraq. "So what?" he said. "They are only against it now because of the reverses. Sixty-two percent of Americans aren't against war; they're against losing."

Tasini gave a standard stump speech, proclaiming himself and all those in the audience to be "patriotic Americans." Hawkins, in turn, praised Tasini for opposing Clinton on the Iraq war, and invited disgruntled Democrats to vote for him in the November election.

The following is the five-minute speech delivered by SEP candidate Bill Van Auken, which was repeatedly interrupted by applause:

"I would like to thank Peace Action and US Tour of Duty for inviting me to participate in tonight's meeting. I must admit that I am not familiar with the League of Women Voters criteria on candidates. It is the first time that the Socialist Equality Party is appearing on the statewide ballot in New York. And it is also true that I have even less campaign funds than Jonathan Tasini. Finally, we are not offering a "Plan B" for the Democrats, but rather a socialist alternative for the working class.

But I would like to speak about the criteria that I and my party did meet over the recent weeks, which includes surmounting what are the most undemocratic ballot access laws that exist in any so-called advanced capitalist democracy in the world.

To obtain ballot status in New York, the Socialist Equality

Party had to gather the signatures of tens of thousands of fellow New Yorkers in the space of just six weeks.

We sought and received support for a campaign based upon the demand for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and a socialist program to end social inequality.

This support came largely from working class neighborhoods in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Harlem, the Lower East Side as well as in Buffalo and other areas upstate and throughout New York.

The main impression one takes away from such a campaign is the seething hatred for the war among people who have felt its consequences firsthand, that is, within the working class. Among those signing to place us on the ballot was a mother in Lefrak City Queens whose son was killed in Iraq and who said that the war must end, so no one else's children have to die.

Friends of a young man on the Lower East Side who died earlier this month in a rocket attack in Ramadi signed, telling us that all he wanted was to get money for his family and to attend college, and he did not want to be in Iraq. We received support from many active-duty soldiers, veterans of the war and many, many relatives and friends of men and women in uniform who are either in Iraq, recently returned or about to go back for second and third tours of duty. Also supporting us were youth—and their parents—who are tired of being hounded by military recruiters in their schools and neighborhoods.

They are outraged over this war based upon lies and want it to end now. Moreover, they know that they are bearing its full burden, both in terms of deaths and casualties, as well as the continuing decline in living standards and the gutting of what little remains of social programs. Meanwhile, the multi-millionaires and billionaires who form the core constituency of both the Democratic and Republican parties have reaped super profits off this war.

The fight against this war must begin with an understanding that it is not a mistake, but a premeditated crime.

The premeditation began not merely with Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Co. It was, after all, Bill Clinton, who signed the 1998 act committing the US to Iraqi "regime change." And successive administrations going back to FDR have committed military force to secure US domination of the crucial oil resources of the Middle East and project American power throughout the region.

Between the two major parties, there is no fundamental disagreement on the crime itself, only on the quality of the premeditation.

Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party accuse Bush of botching the job; they call for a "smarter" war, while insisting that defeat is not an option.

The Socialist Equality Party begins with the opposite conception, that for a criminal war the only desirable outcome is defeat, and the sooner that every US soldier is out of that country the better. Success in Iraq will only lay the groundwork

for new and more terrible wars.

Our party insists that the precondition for conducting a successful struggle against war, repression and the attacks on living standards and democratic rights is a complete break with the Democratic Party and the entire framework of the bipartisan "two-party system."

To the extent that differences exist between the Democratic and Republican parties, they are merely of a tactical character—over how best to secure the interests of the ruling elite within the United States and globally.

It is time to draw the lesson of the entire experience since the stolen election of 2000, which the Democrats accepted. They voted for the war in 2002 to get the issue off the political agenda in the last midterm election. In 2004, much of the antiwar movement was diverted into the "Anybody but Bush" crusade, first behind Dean and then behind Kerry, who vowed to continue the war in any case. November's election will prove no different. A Democratic victory will not bring an end to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, much less halt the preparation of new wars, in Iran or elsewhere.

The Democratic Party long ago embraced militarism, repudiated any policy of social reform and dedicated itself to policies designed to further enrich the wealthiest layers of society at the expense of the working population. Yet, albeit with ever less basis and conviction, it continues to pose as a "party of the people" in order to suffocate and neutralize any movement of social opposition from below.

I would argue that, in the final analysis, opposing the Democrats from within, fighting for the party's so-called soul, only helps to perpetuate this threadbare myth.

The most burning issue today is the establishment of the political independence of working people, the vast majority of the population, from the two parties controlled by big business. This is the central purpose of the Socialist Equality Party's election campaign.

The SEP will use its position on the ballot to attack and expose Hillary Clinton and her support for the war with all the force we can muster. But we will likewise do everything we can to make it clear that she is no aberration, but rather the authentic voice of the Democratic Party, and has \$24 million in campaign funds to prove it.

I would urge you to study the SEP's program, which can be found on the *World Socialist Web Site*, and I ask for your vote in November in order to help lay the foundations for a new mass socialist movement of American working people dedicated to ending war and the capitalist system that creates it."



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