Important vote for SEP candidates in US elections

Our reporter
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Nearly 12,000 voters cast ballots for Socialist Equality Party candidates in New York, Michigan, Illinois and Maine during Tuesday's US mid-term elections. The vote, in the face of the myriad of restrictions aimed at keeping voters from hearing the views of third party candidates, was significant and indicative of the growing audience for a socialist alternative.

In **New York State**, Bill Van Auken, the SEP candidate for US Senate, received 7,738 votes, with 99 percent of the precincts reporting. Van Auken, whose supporters gathered nearly 25,000 signatures to place him on the ballot, ran against Senator Hillary Clinton, the Democrats' leading contender for the 2008 presidential nomination, who raised $35 million to retain her Senate seat.

In **Michigan**'s 12th Congressional District, 1,863 people—or 1 percent of the voters—cast ballots for SEP congressional candidate Jerome White, who was running in Detroit's northern suburbs against US Representative Sander Levin, a 24-year Democratic incumbent.

In east central **Illinois**, Joe Parnarauskis, the SEP state Senate candidate in the 52nd District, received 1,893 votes, or 3.4 percent of the total, in a race against Democrat Mike Frerichs, who narrowly defeated Republican Judy Myers.

In **Maine,** Eric Des Marais, the SEP's candidate for state Senate in the 32nd Legislative District, received 294 votes, or 2.27 percent of the total, in the district that includes the city of Bangor.

Election officials in California and Oregon have said it will be weeks before they tally the votes of SEP candidates who were forced to conduct write-in campaigns after being excluded from the ballot due to restrictive laws against third party candidates.

John Burton was 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. Burton ran against incumbent Congressman Adam Schiff, one of the leading right-wingers in the Democratic Party who has openly supported the militarist agenda of the Bush administration and its attack on Constitutional rights.

In Oregon's 19th District, which includes a section of southwest Portland and the surrounding suburbs, Christie Schaefer was the SEP candidate for state Senate against Richard Devlin, the incumbent senator. Forty-one write-in ballots were cast for state Senate in the district, but it is not clear if they were all for Schaefer.

While the national vote on Tuesday revealed the enormous opposition to the Bush administration and its criminal war in Iraq, those who voted for the SEP made a conscious political decision to support a socialist alternative to both big business parties.

A closer examination of the SEP vote suggests that important sections of working people and youth are moving politically to the left. It also showed that where the SEP candidates were able to break through the censorship of the media and receive coverage, as well as participate in candidate forums, this exposure increased their votes.

In New York City, despite being placed in an obscure position on the ballot, Bill Van Auken received 2,594 votes. Of those, 1,299 were from Manhattan, an indication that a layer of intellectuals and students went to the polls specifically looking to vote for the SEP candidate.

In Erie County, which includes Buffalo, where the SEP campaigned extensively, the party received 550 votes. In Monroe County, which includes Rochester, where Van Auken was interviewed on the local ABC-TV affiliate, the SEP candidate received 273 votes.

While this was the first time the SEP appeared on a statewide ballot in New York, Van Auken outpolled the US Senate candidate of the Socialist Workers Party, a movement that abandoned Trotskyism in favor of the middle class protest politics of the 1960s and has run candidates in the state for decades. Outside of New York City, Van Auken got more votes than the SWP in 47 out of 57 counties.

The Senate candidate of the reformist Green Party received 52,017 votes or 1 percent of the total in New York.

In Michigan, SEP congressional candidate Jerome White received the majority of his votes—1,315 out of 1,863—in the working class suburbs of Macomb County. In the 1980s this area was home to the "Reagan Democrats," i.e., better off, mostly white, trade unionists who were taken in by the anti-welfare, anti-tax and militarist nostrums of the Republicans.

Since then their conditions have severely deteriorated, with the loss of 27,000—or 22 percent—of the county's manufacturing

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jobs over the last five years alone, and a sharp jump in home foreclosures and families seeking housing and food assistance since last year. The area has also seen a disproportionate number of young people and military reservists killed and wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, contributing to the anger against the war and support for the SEP demand for the immediate withdrawal of US troops.

White's largest votes in Macomb County were in Warren (356), home of several auto plants and GM's Tech Center, Clinton Township (281) and St. Clair Shores (201). His largest vote in neighboring Oakland County was in Southfield (225). The SEP candidate outpolled the congressional candidate of the Greens throughout the 12th District.

The highest percentage of the vote received by a SEP candidate was in Illinois, where state Senate candidate Joe Parnarauskis garnered 3.41 percent of the vote. The campaign gained wide exposure through the months-long fight by the SEP to defeat the Illinois Democratic Party's effort to exclude Parnarauskis from the ballot through a bad-faith challenge to his nominating petitions.

In addition to the media coverage of the campaign, Parnarauskis was able to participate in several debates and candidates forums, where he was able to advance a socialist alternative to the two parties of war and big business, as well as the reformist program of the Greens.

The SEP vote in Illinois was up from the 1,462 votes it received in 2004, when Tom Mackaman ran for state legislature after defeating a similar Democratic Party effort to bar him from the ballot.

In the county of Champaign, the home of the University of Illinois, Parnarauskis received 4.18 percent of the vote, registering 11.5 percent of vote in one campus polling precinct. In addition to the student residences, the SEP candidate did very well in working class areas of Champaign, taking over 6 percent in one precinct and nearly 8 percent in another.

In the neighboring city of Urbana, the SEP candidate took 9 and 6 percent of the votes in two working class districts on the east of the city. In the middle of Urbana—like Champaign, mixed working-class, students and university-related—Parnarauskis got over 10 percent of the vote in two precincts. In Vermilion County, which includes the economically depressed city of Danville and the neighboring coal mining towns, the SEP candidate received 2.48 percent of the vote.

During the course of the election the Democratic Party dispatched US Senators Barack Obama and Dick Durban to the 52nd District to rescue their state Senate candidate Mike Frerichs, who was badly discredited by the party's undemocratic effort to exclude the SEP from the ballot as well as Parnarauskis's exposure of the pro-war policies of the Democrats. In the end, the Democrat won by little more than 500 votes, allowing the party to take the east central seat for the first time in decades.

As it was nationally, the Republican Party was soundly defeated in Illinois, unable to come close to winning a statewide office of any kind. At the same time, the popular disgust with both parties was expressed in the vote for Green Party gubernatorial candidate Richard Whitney, who received over 345,000 votes or nearly 11 percent of the electorate.

Another manifestation of the anger over the war in Iraq was the passing by wide margins in Urbana and Champaign of a non-binding referendum calling for the withdrawal of US troops. Another "advisory" measure to impeach Bush and to resist the mobilization of the Illinois National Guard for the war passed by wide margins in Urbana, while a referendum to impeach Bush narrowly failed in Champaign.

Finally, in Maine, SEP candidate Eric Des Marais won significant support in the working class neighborhoods of Bangor, a city of 31,473 that is the economic hub of the northern, central, and eastern parts of the state. In District 15 he polled 5 percent of all votes and in District 16, one of the most economically hard hit areas of the city, he received 3 percent of the vote.

The number of workers and youth who consciously decided to vote for a socialist alternative remains small. The two corporate parties have unlimited resources and, along with the corporate controlled news media, they do everything they can to prevent working people from hearing a socialist alternative. Nevertheless, the SEP reached tens of thousands of working people and youth with its socialist program, distributing hundreds of thousands of copies of its electoral material and its candidates issuing dozens of public statements on the most pressing political issues.

In addition, the SEP held public meetings throughout the country and addressed dozens of electoral events, in which it warned that the war and other attacks on working people would continue regardless of which party won the majority on Election Day. Our campaign has helped lay the foundation for a socialist alternative as the aspirations of the population—to end the war, stop the attack on democratic rights and social inequality—inevitably collide with the reactionary agenda of the Bush administration and the Democratic majority in Congress.

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