

# SEP campaigns in New York, Michigan and Kentucky

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*Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party's presidential and vice presidential candidates Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer have begun campaigns throughout the country to promote a socialist program in the 2012 elections. We publish here reports from Brooklyn in New York City; Ypsilanti, Michigan; and Lexington, Kentucky. For more information and to get involved, visit [socialequality.com](http://socialequality.com).*

## New York City

Campaigners in New York City took to the streets of Brooklyn's East Flatbush neighborhood on Saturday.

East Flatbush, a working-class neighborhood of about 124,000 residents, has been hard-hit by the recession. The official unemployment rate is 11 percent, but the real unemployment and underemployment rate is close to 20 percent, with figures for the youth much higher. Over 20 percent live below the poverty line. Median income in 2009 was approximately \$43,000 a year.

Over half of East Flatbush's residents are foreign-born, including Haitian, Jamaican, Trinidadian and Guyanese workers.

The campaign worked near Flatbush Gardens, a 59-building apartment complex, where 70 building workers have been locked out for 15 months for refusing to accept a 30 percent cut to wages and benefits.

Patrick Jean Baptiste, a senior at Prospect Heights High School, told the campaign, "Even when Obama first ran I thought it was all hype.

"The Democrats and Republicans do the same thing. Obama has compromised on all the issues for the poor. Look at the benefits for the unemployed. They keep cutting them off. There is no support for these people.

"In my school there are layoffs of teachers, and they try to ridicule teachers who stand up for their rights. I attribute this to Obama's 'Race to the Top' program which is the continuation from Bush. This is a downward spiral in which education is declining."

Many people took leaflets when campaigners said that workers in Flatbush should vote for their own needs, not for those of the billionaires.

## Ypsilanti, Michigan

SEP campaign supporters distributed Jerry White's election statement and spoke to residents on the east side of Ypsilanti, Michigan, where many retired and out-of-work auto workers live.

Ypsilanti, already hard hit, has been thrust into deepening distress by the collapse of the auto industry. In 2009, GM announced it would close down the historic Willow Run Assembly plant—one of the largest buildings in the world and a place that at one time boasted a workforce of 15,000. Ford's Visteon plant was also sold off in 2009, and nearly 250,000 square feet of the factory was demolished the following year. Thousands of Ypsilanti auto workers have been thrown out of work.

Ricky, a food service worker for Ypsilanti's Willow Run Community School District, told SEP supporters that he voted for Obama in 2008. However, the president's agenda, combined with attacks at the state level, had the public school system "hanging by a thin thread. Our kids need a decent education. Schools don't have the teachers they need."

Schools in Ypsilanti have been subjected to repeated budget cuts, closures, and privatization of services. Willow Run schools, located in neighborhoods where the tax base collapsed after the closure of the plant, is among those targeted for takeover by the state for "under-performance." Ricky said, "Schools are getting hit; janitors, teachers, buses, food, everything got cut. I think we need a change. What we have now isn't working. We need to do something.

"I know a lot of people who are going back down south, to Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee," Ricky said, alluding to the Great Migration of poor families from the South in search of industrial jobs. "They couldn't stay here anymore because their retirement from Ford doesn't pay enough."

Stacey McKinney said he used to work at Ford, but that he took a buyout rather than be shifted to another plant in Dearborn. "The aches and pains, the fatigue on your body is too much," he said.

"I think it's all wrong," he said of the auto industry. "They're top

heavy. You see CEOs with stocks, perks, vacation homes. They cut workers, but bring in executives on \$600,000 salaries, plus perks. They're in that process of eventually making it so there's no middle class. There's only the haves and the have-nots. It's the same with the gas prices. They could do something about it, but the companies are the ones in charge of government policy."

Stacey said that his parents both worked for GM for 30 years, but were stripped of a dignified retirement during the restructuring of the industry. "How can they do that to people who worked for *30 years* of their lives?"

"I wasn't going to vote in this election—I'm sick of it," Stacey explained. "It's controlled by the rich."

"I told my son that Republicans and Democrats are all liars. They're not doing nothing for us. They think they can say what they want and think we're desensitized, and dumb, and that we will vote for them anyway."

"My son wants to go to war. I tell him they're not fighting over anything but what they want. The weapons industry, that's your senator making money. It might not be his name on the company, but the money is behind the decisions he makes. We're not fighting somebody who is a threat to us. It's about dominating the oil and the things they want."

"The whole political system needs an enema. It needs to be flushed out and replaced by a group of people with the same background as you and me. The government says the economy is getting better, but they're looking out at their own backyards, and their neighbors' yards. I see my backyard, though," he said, gesturing over to his neighborhood, "and it doesn't look any better than my neighbors'."

Stacey also commented on the way that the bottom line compromised safety and quality, drawing a comparison between the BP oil spill and the series of recalls in the auto industry. "I can point out a problem in the production of a part on the line, and I will be told, 'do you know how much that adjustment will cost?' In other words, the recalls—and the accidents—are already factored into cost. If you point out a problem to the union, they will say, 'let me talk to management and get back to you.' And then you are considered a troublemaker on the line. The unions are a joke. They are in bed with management."

## Lexington, Kentucky

Campaigners in Lexington focused on the working class neighborhoods of Lexington's north side, distributing statements by Jerry White at local grocery stores and speaking with workers about their experiences.

Lexington's north side neighborhood is part of the city's historic district and home to many of Lexington's most notable historical sites

and oldest buildings, which sit side by side with Lexington's most impoverished homes. It is one of the city's poorest areas. In 2009, the median household income was just below \$26,000, far below the then statewide median income of \$40,000.

Among the many workers SEP supporters spoke with Sunday was Susan, who has worked as a postal clerk for nearly four years. She is now in danger of losing her job. Her husband, a teacher, has also been furloughed.

At least eight postal facilities in Kentucky are expected to close or cut mail processing operations in the coming months, including Lexington's Nandino Boulevard processing center, which employs approximately 300 workers. The closures are part of the US Postal Service's efforts to slash jobs and cut costs nationwide.

At a recent public meeting held to discuss the closures and cut-backs, Susan said representatives of the Postal Service could not answer the questions of members of the public or of the postal workers themselves. She said workers are told one thing by their superiors but hear something different in news coverage of the closures.

"There is no definite answer as to whether we're going to be laid off," she said. "We hear in the news there's 90 days before anything will happen. Then we hear there's nothing till May, then October."

"In the fall," she said, "we had a two year contract with the union, but the federal government will probably just violate that." Susan said she would like to have more discussion with SEP members.

SEP members also spoke with David, a retired equipment operator and a former member of the Teamsters union. David said he draws social security benefits but said, "I can't even live off of that."

David was eager to speak about US involvement in wars in the Middle East. "We send all these young men to fight," he said, "and for what? We have got to stop these wars." He was angry about the unequal treatment between the rich and poor in the criminal justice system. "If a rich man came up and shot us, and a poor man came up and shot us," he said, "who do you think is going to get away with it? The rich man."

David was doubtful that things would improve and expressed disgust with the political system, saying at one point "We're all going to die poor." In spite of this, David said he would like to have more discussion with campaigners and gave a donation to the SEP election fund.



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