

SEP campaigns in Tampa, Florida and Detroit, Michigan

Our reporters
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Over the weekend, supporters of the Socialist Equality Party election campaign spoke to workers in Tampa, Florida and Detroit, Michigan. For more information and to get involved, visit socialequality.com.

Tampa, Florida

On Friday, members of the University of South Florida chapter of International Students for Social Equality and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party 2012 presidential election campaign spoke with workers in the Tampa Bay area. The SEP is organizing an election meeting on April 10.

Campaigners distributed leaflets and spoke with many workers about the issues raised by the SEP campaign.

A middle-aged worker named Chris said, “Our country is in bad shape. The machine is already in place in Washington, and we can’t go against it. There’s no way to change. I’m especially upset with the banking situation and the fees pushed onto workers because of it.”

When asked what he felt would need to happen to elicit real change in the United States, Chris answered, “I’m not sure. We want people to represent us, but they don’t. They only represent the rich people.”

Chris and Matthew, a supporter of the campaign, discussed the differences between the Democratic and Republican parties. Matthew noted that the Obama administration had largely adopted the program of the Republicans, and had extended the right-wing policies of Bush.

Leroy Jackson was waiting for a bus when he spoke to the SEP campaigners. The biggest problem in the United States is that “the rich control all of the money,” he said. “The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. No one seems to care about the little people. They don’t seem to know that money isn’t everything.”

“I sit out here and I watch people get off the buses. I think more than 60 percent of the people riding are women. If both parents are working, who is taking care of their kids?”

Leroy said he thought it would be a great idea for both education and health care to be provided to everyone as a social right. “I think everyone should have the opportunity to go to college without having to go into debt.”

On the question of military intervention in foreign countries, Leroy suggested that “people need help sometimes, but I think our government only goes in there because they want something, whether it’s oil or something else.” Matthew then related the recent events in Afghanistan and noted the mass opposition to the US occupation. Leroy agreed, “There must be some reason. There must be some ties that our government wants to keep.”

Leroy also agreed that “humanitarian” justifications for war in Libya and Syria were pretexts. “There is something else there that they want.”

A middle-aged worker named Ade said that he did not feel that a socialist form of economy would work. “It sounds so good at first, but it will eventually fall apart,” he said. “We need to have competition between providers such as utility companies to get the best service.” When Matthew reminded Ade that Tampa only has one electricity provider, TECO, Chris remained adamant: “If the government controls utilities, I do not think that we will get the best

service.”

While Ade stood by capitalism and the “free market,” he conceded, “It is difficult to go to college within our current system.”

Detroit, Michigan

On Saturday, campaigners won support for the Socialist Equality Party presidential and vice presidential candidates at Eastern Market in Detroit. This six-block public market, with its dozens of local vendors and merchants, is frequented by a cross section of workers and young people from Detroit and its surrounding suburban areas.

The campaign team included a member of the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs (CAUS). CAUS members recently voted to endorse the SEP presidential campaign.

In addition to distributing Jerry White’s election statement, campaigners also distributed an article from the WSWs on Michigan Governor Snyder’s proposal to appoint an unelected financial control board to run the City of Detroit. This board would have the authority to impose draconian cuts on a population already suffering conditions of high unemployment and extreme poverty.

Unemployed workers, teachers and city workers disagreed with Snyder’s proposal for the city were eager to discuss a socialist campaign. Many purchased copies of the Socialist Equality Party program, “The Breakdown of Capitalism and the Fight for Socialism in the United States.”

A young worker who purchased the program and made a financial donation remarked, “They say the banks are too big to fail, what about us? More money needs to go for social programs instead of bailing out the rich.”

A middle-aged artist, Ed I. James, Jr. said, “I grew up in this city and graduated from Mumford High School at the top of my class. Mumford was a wonderful school. I was in the Young Writers club and participated in many activities that young people were encouraged to do. My mother was a public school teacher who supported social change and taught me to

do the same. Writers and artists who have so much to contribute to society are not able to do so and are among the oppressed. The corporate structure of society makes it self-destructive. I will check out this campaign because what we have now is not working.”

An important discussion took place with a number of teachers on the destruction of public education and the role of the teachers union. In the past week, Governor Snyder signed into a law a bill that prevents school districts from deducting union dues and fees from employee paychecks. At the heart of such legislation is the attempt to destroy the ability of workers to have any form of organization. The issue that arose in the discussion focused on what teachers can do to oppose these attacks and why the existing unions are unable to do so.

The teachers clearly saw the problem with their union supporting the Obama administration and remarked that he has gone beyond the Bush administration in attacking public education.

Campaigners emphasized the need for workers to build new organizations, explaining that it was impossible for the existing unions, who function as a central bulwark of support for the Democratic Party, to defend their interests.



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