

# SEP election supporters campaign in several Michigan cities

A reporting team  
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Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party presidential campaign spoke to workers in Kalamazoo, Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor, Michigan about the issues in the 2012 elections.

Kalamazoo, Michigan is the largest city in the Southwest portion of the state, with about 325,000 people in the metropolitan area. It was once alternately known as “The Paper City” and “The Celery City” for its major industrial and agricultural products. By the 1960s, many of the city’s paper mills were closed, leaving a legacy of empty factory buildings and water pollution.

Kalamazoo was also the home of the Upjohn Company, a pharmaceutical giant now owned by Pfizer, as well as the Checker Cab Company and Gibson Guitars, neither of which remain.

While campaigning outside the public library and a Meijer grocery store, SEP supporters engaged in conversation with a cross-section of Kalamazoo’s population including workers, students and professionals. While the responses to the SEP were varied, they indicate a deep frustration with the existing political apparatus.

One worker said he agreed that there was no real difference between the two big business parties. “I think it’s a shame how money drives everything in government, and that most decisions are geared toward helping what’s basically a tiny layer of people, a plutocracy. And Obama had such a good opportunity to do a lot of important things in 2008, and he’s ended up, basically, continuing all of Bush’s policies. He’s basically more right-wing than Bush.”

After listening to a SEP supporter explain the election campaign, another worker responded, “Well, I’m just going vote for Obama again.” When asked what specifically he liked about Obama, he said that Obama

is ending Bush’s wars, stopping home foreclosures and trying to reverse the economic damage caused by Bush.

The SEP supporters reviewed Obama’s real record of expanding war and unyielding support for the banks. Nothing has been done to address the immense social crisis facing millions of people, and the vast majority of income growth has gone to the top one percent.

“The paper mills closed down and the union did nothing,” said another worker, a member of the United Steelworkers of America. He said he had heard about the isolation and betrayal of the Cooper Tire workers in Findlay, Ohio. “It is terrible what happened to them. The union works it all out with the companies. It’s all set up and decided before they bring anything to us. They left those Cooper Tire workers out to dry just like the union did during the Hormel meatpackers strike twenty-five years ago.”

In 1986, United Food and Commercial Workers international leadership ordered an end to the eight-month strike at Hormel, put the local in Austin, Minnesota under trusteeship, took over the union hall and signed a contract with Hormel covering the scabs who crossed the picket line. Not a single striker was rehired.

“I believe there is no difference between the Democrats and Republicans,” he added. “Things are getting more and more difficult for us. I have seen a lot over the years. I want to look into your campaign. We need an alternative.”

SEP campaigners are also regularly campaigning in both Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, two cities just west of Detroit. Ann Arbor is home to the University of Michigan. While it has one of the highest median income rates in the state, the number of people living below the poverty line was determined at 19.9 percent in 2010. Ypsilanti, a former auto manufacturing hub

and home to Eastern Michigan University, has approximately 24 percent of its population living below the poverty line.

Campaigners have found that the general mood is supportive, with many expressing a lack of confidence in Obama and the political system.

A retired teacher spoke about the need for an alternative to the two-party system, though he muted his criticisms of the Democratic Party by speaking primarily of the cuts to social spending favored by the Republicans and claiming that Obama had been “stupid to think that he could work with them.” He acknowledged, however, that the administration had been willing to make cuts to Medicaid and Social Security.

He repeatedly referred to the American public’s ignorance of socialism saying, “We have socialism in things like Social Security and yet people are told they should hate it.” During another part of the conversation, however, the teacher referred to the terrible history of McCarthyism. “If I had tried to tell my students that the capitalist system was the problem, I would have been fired,” he said.

One young autoworker expressed interest in the campaign but differed with the SEP’s position on the role of unions. Though not a union official herself, she expressed views close to the officials, most significantly on the question of the Democratic Party and Obama, for whom she planned to vote.

“It took a long time for conditions to get as bad as they are; it will take more than four years for them to get better,” she argued. She did not counter the SEP campaigner when he explained the actual content of the administration’s policies during these same four years.



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