

SEP campaigns for election meeting in Quad Cities

Our reporters
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Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Students for Social Equality have been campaigning in the Quad Cities (Iowa and Illinois) in preparation for an upcoming public meeting with presidential candidate Jerry White on Tuesday, May 29.

The Quad Cities, with a total population near 400,000, comprises several towns straddling the Iowa and Illinois sides of the Mississippi River. Traditionally the home of the farm equipment industry, the area suffered devastating manufacturing job losses in the 1970s and 1980s.

Wide wealth disparities persist throughout the region. While in Bettendorf, the smallest of the Quad Cities, 4.8 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, the rate is 14.5 percent in Rock Island, Illinois, including nearly a quarter of those under the age of 18. Unemployment continues to plague the area. In Rock Island County, which includes Moline, Rock Island, and the surrounding farmland, employment declined 8.4 percent between 2000 and 2009.

SEP supporters have been campaigning at grocery stores, in working class neighborhoods, and at public transportation stops throughout the Quad Cities. Robin, a mail carrier, said of President Obama, "He's done nothing for me." She said that she has worked several manufacturing jobs in the area, and that she has witnessed firsthand the inability of union leaders to defend workers' living standards. "I used to work a number of UAW jobs. You know what we used to call them? You Ain't Working."

Alan Porter approached a campaign team when he heard that they were promoting a meeting with a socialist candidate. "I'm a carpenter and own a small remodeling company. I'm concerned about the

economy and how it's affecting the poor." He said that he tries to hire those who seem like they are down on their luck, but that it has been much more difficult since the onset of the housing crisis and the recession. "I'm going to try to make it work, but it's just not taking off yet." He said that he was interested in hearing something different than what the Democrats and Republicans were offering and would come to the meeting on Tuesday.

A worker at the Oscar Meyer-Kraft factory in Davenport, Iowa, when asked about the economic conditions she faces, said, "There are a lot of things I don't like. Things are changing for the worse. The wealthy don't understand the lower man." She said that management at her workplace has been letting go of full-time workers and replacing them with younger, part-time workers who make significantly less.

When asked about the elections, the worker said, "These politicians are for the rich, not the people who live paycheck to paycheck." She also expressed sympathy with Nichols Aluminum workers, whose production facility is located close to Oscar Meyer's in Davenport. Their strike was called off by the Teamster leadership last month when management hired permanent replacement workers. "I think it's awful what they did over there. They was trying to fight for their rights."

Stephanie Oxley previously worked as an executive assistant but has been unemployed for over two years. "I'm lucky because I have a support network, but most people don't have that." She said regarding the Obama administration and health care reform, "What has he done for the people? I don't know anybody who has health insurance who didn't have it before." Stephanie

pointed to the devastating effect that the recession has had on the region: “You can look around and see all the foreclosures in Davenport, all the empty houses, all the homelessness. Why do you think some people have become so hopeless? You see guys walking around with bottles in brown bags and you understand why. You see it every day, and it’s so sad.

“I live in a house with five other families. We make sure the kids have enough to eat first. There are kids at my daughter’s school who go home and don’t have any food at all.” Regarding the supposed economic recovery’s effect on Davenport, she said, “There’s 50 jobs here, 200 jobs there, but it’s not making a dent in unemployment.”

Renee stopped to talk while her two young grandchildren played outside a Save-A-Lot in West Davenport. “The recession is affecting everyone around here. It’s ludicrous to think otherwise. [But] the corporations are still getting wealthy and avoiding taxes.” She said that she’s had three children go through college, all of whom are facing substantial student loan debt. “My son studied chemistry and has \$27,000 in student loans. You know he’s not going to get any federal assistance after school.”

A union roofer, who was waiting for his bus home after his shift, said about the major candidates, “I haven’t heard anything I liked. Frankly, the lobbyists get everything they want, while the rest of us get dumped on.” Regarding the recession, he said, “It’s hit me hard. They’ve taken a lot out of our pensions. We used to get 75 percent of our contributions back; now we only get 25 percent.” When told about the SEP’s election platform and its demand for social rights for the working class, he said, “You’re right. Everyone should have a job.”



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