

SEP campaign team speaks with students and workers at Milwaukee Area colleges

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The Socialist Equality Party continued to gather signatures to gain ballot access in the general election as it campaigned at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and at the Milwaukee Area Technical College earlier this week.

UWM has faced six straight years of tuition hikes, with the Regents voting 17-1 earlier this month for another 5.5 percent increase to take effect this fall. Tuition has doubled in the last decade. MATC students also face a 5.5 percent tuition hike. The increases in tuition in Wisconsin are part of a national program to shift the cost of social services on to the working class.

SEP campaigners spoke with students and employees about last year's budget bill, which slashed \$46.1 million from UW funding, about living conditions, and about the 2012 elections.

"My hours are getting cut. I'm a student employee, and so the budget cuts effect me," said Saif, an undergraduate at UWM. "My hours have been cut, and I have less money for tuition, books, and supplies. It really effects my education. I vote every chance I get, but I hardly feel that it makes a difference."

Danielle, who is studying to be a social worker at UWM, said, "I'm a project assistant, and I've seen my stipend go down. I am living on very small funds so it hurts. I've seen the need for hiring more faculty, and it limits the educational opportunities for students. They hire more adjunct professors and there is a difference in the level of learning that goes on."

Danielle said she doesn't believe the claims made by politicians that "there is no money" to fund social programs. "There *is* money, it's just how we allocate it. It's going to war and prisons. As a social worker, I think we have intelligent people in this country, and we

don't spend money on preventative social services."

She also expressed concern with the growing prison population in America. "I think the prison systems are representative of capitalism. Without poverty, capitalism can't survive. I'm concerned about our approach to privatizing prisons."

Danielle added that she has a hard time distinguishing between the Democrats and Republicans. "When it comes down to it," she said, "corporations support them both. There isn't much of a difference."

Jamal Ward is an 18-year old UWM student who was asked by the SEP whether he believes education is a social right. "Of course it is," he said. "Without an education, what can you do? They're cutting money for teachers, well how are people going to learn, then?"

Jessica, a student at the Milwaukee Area Technical College, said she doesn't think the budget cuts are necessary. "I don't think they need to happen. Who does it really help? They cut things that are important like healthcare and education."

On the subject of the 2012 elections, Jessica said, "I want the candidates to be able to help the people and not the rich people. *We're* stuck at a standstill, and they're getting better. I have a job and I'm a student and I'm still struggling. I have a brother that's been to school and still can't find a job. How are there any jobs when unemployment is going up? Something is not right."

The crisis at the University of Wisconsin also affects university employees, like custodial staff member Peggy Scott, who makes \$20,000 a year and is looking for another job to pay the bills.

"Because of our insurance now my payroll is half, and I don't think it's fair." She said. "Something has

to change. They should sit in our shoes for a second.... It's unfair. Everybody should share the wealth. What gets me is that they won't educate someone, but for \$40,000 a year they'll pay for someone to go to prison."

Peggy did not see any way forward with either the Democrats or Republicans this November, and told the SEP that "both sides are all about money. Nobody cares about poor people. We'll remain the way we are because we don't have money. Notice that nobody ever says anything about the 'working class' or the poor. They only say 'middle' or 'upper middle' class."

Ebony, a nurse's assistant and MATC student, expressed fears about further cuts. "What—are we going back to the slavery days? How are they going to take from people with nothing?"

She also voiced her anger at the misappropriation of wealth in capitalist society. On military spending, she said, "We have wars for *what*? What are we fighting for? We need everything to be even money wise. My rent is \$570 a month, and I don't even make enough to pay that, let alone the other bills."

Ron, a retired veteran and student at MATC, told the SEP that he has no faith in the two parties. "They've got us brainwashed on this two-party system, and they're demonizing socialism. They try to pander to voters, and they're all the same. Corporations are the paymasters of the two-party system. We need a total reorganization of our government and our system. I don't see a turn around unless something totally different happens in this country."

For more information on the SEP campaign, visit socialequality.com.



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