

SEP ballot drive in Wisconsin surpasses signature requirement

Our reporter
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In the course of seven days, the Socialist Equality Party campaign team in Wisconsin has gathered more than the 2,000 signatures required to place the party's presidential and vice-presidential candidates, Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer, on the state ballot in November.

This weekend, the team plans to fan out across the state to go well beyond the minimum requirement of signatures and safeguard against any challenges Democratic and Republican election authorities may make to the nominating petitions.

In a week, campaigners gathered 2,130 signatures from workers and young people in Milwaukee, West Allis, South Milwaukee, Madison and other cities. The accomplishment is particularly significant given that petitioners had to confront private property laws when campaigning in shopping malls, and on at least two occasions were told by Milwaukee police that they would face arrest if they did not leave.

"The support that Phyllis and I have won in Wisconsin thus far is an indication of the determination of the working class to find a way out of the dead end of the capitalist two-party system," Jerry White told the WWS. "Everywhere we have campaigned—among workers at Caterpillar, Master Lock and other industrial locations, young people at the University of Wisconsin and the Milwaukee Area Technical College, and in the neighborhoods and shopping centers—we have won a powerful response for our socialist program and the fight to unite the working class internationally against war, poverty and inequality."

Campaigners have sought to draw the lessons of the mass movement of the working class that emerged last year against Republican Governor Scott Walker. The powerful movement was suppressed by the trade unions and various liberal and pseudo-left supporters of the Democratic Party, which shut down the mass protests and diverted anger into a recall campaign to replace Walker

with a Democratic governor.

While the defeat of that movement was aimed at demoralizing the working class, none of the social impulses that motivated the protests—deep anger over social inequality, budget cuts and the imperviousness of the whole political system to the needs and aspirations of the working class—has gone away. On the contrary, they have deepened.

White led a team of campaigners Friday in West Allis, a former company town of 60,000 people just outside of Milwaukee. The farm equipment manufacturer Allis Chalmers once employed thousands of workers locally, but shut its plant and corporate offices in 1998-99. Campaigners encountered widespread disgust with both Obama and Romney, with one worker telling White, "They don't care about us. All they care about is the rich."

Vice-presidential candidate Phyllis Scherrer spoke to workers familiar with the work of the Socialist Equality Party during the protests last year in Madison. Richard King told Scherrer, "I wasn't surprised. The labor leaders strategy is exactly like your analysis said. The entire unfolding followed along your analysis. I am anti-Democrat and anti-Republican. You're from Pittsburgh, so I am sure you have seen the irrational allegiance to the Steelers, like people here are with the Packers. It is a waste of time. People think that 'my mom was a Democrat, my father was a Democrat, so I'll be a Democrat.' They still think that changes are made through the ballot box. I understand you utilizing the elections as an instrument to change society. There can be no compromises."

Larry Dean Ellis, Jr. told the vice-presidential candidate, "I was pretty sure that there wasn't going to be a positive outcome. I felt that you were right." Regarding the treachery of the trade unions he said, "I heard this with my own ears, so please tell it. Two union leaders came

into my coffee shop. They were more interested in getting dues out of people with the dues checkoff even though they were not representing their people. They sounded more like businessmen. They asked me where the best restaurants were. They meant five-star restaurants, not the best Italian food or pizza. They wanted to know which restaurants had the best wine. They are defending their bottom line, not their members.”

During petitioning, Scherrer met a 22 year-old factory worker. Anthony told the candidate that he was concerned about education: “My high school was inside of a middle school. It was small, and we had to be cautious because of the younger kids and their teachers. Sometimes the middle schoolers would run through and interrupt the high schoolers’ classes. There is a high school that used to be called West Division northbound on Titonia. There are four high schools inside of one building.”

Scherrer asked him about Milwaukee as the nation’s test case for charter schools. Anthony was disgusted with the outcome of stripping schools of funding in Milwaukee to finance charter schools that were unaccountable. “School funding has been cut,” he said. “The graduation rate was already low, cuts in funding and overcrowding have made it worse. Most of the students in Milwaukee are African American. Most don’t graduate. So, what do you expect? They have no future.

“The suburban schools are not being pressed together, they are getting funding since it’s based on property taxes. In Milwaukee the needs are great. Students need books, computer labs, and supplies. I don’t know of any schools with a computer lab. You have to go to the library.

“If one of America’s core beliefs is that children are our future, then shouldn’t we be investing in our children? Shouldn’t children have a better life than their parents? There is a lot of money that is being kept ‘hush-hush.’ I thought that the government was supposed to serve the people.”



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