

SEP launches bid for ballot access in Louisiana

Our reporters
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Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party will be campaigning this week in Louisiana in order to secure ballot access for the 2012 presidential election. Campaigners will recruit electors in all six congressional districts throughout the state over the course of three days. The campaign also serves as an opportunity for the SEP to reach out to new areas and gain an audience with broader layers of the working class.

In addition to campaigning in New Orleans, SEP supporters will visit Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Alexandria, Winnfield, Natchitoches, Logansport, Shreveport, and Monroe.

While in Winnfield, party members will take special consideration of the town's radical past. At one point, all of Winnfield's city officials were self-described socialists. In the 1912 presidential election, Socialist Party candidate Eugene V. Debs received 36 percent of the vote in Winn Parish. The vote for Debs, moreover, would have been far higher if many workers had not been prevented from voting due to residential restrictions and the anti-democratic poll tax.

The state-wide tour represents a significant step forward for the SEP as it comes into contact with broader sections of workers and encourages them to unite internationally in the fight for socialism.

The case for socialism today in Louisiana is particularly pressing. In less than a decade, the state has fallen victim to two major disasters, both of them the products of capitalism.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina nearly destroyed the city of New Orleans. The category-three hurricane, which flooded over 80 per cent of the city and led to the deaths of over one thousand people, was first and foremost a man-made disaster. The immense damage and loss of life could have been avoided had the proper

infrastructure and evacuation preparations been in place.

Most of those who died or suffered the horrors directly following the storm came from the poorest layers of society. Even today, the little "rebuilding" that has been accomplished is of a superficial character. Last August, a report released by the Army Corps of Engineers gave the city's levee system a near-failing grade.

In April 2010, the British Petroleum (BP) owned Deepwater Horizon rig exploded offshore, killing eleven workers and leaking 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico—the largest release of crude oil in history in one of North America's most important ecological systems. The spill affected Louisiana and nearby states, including Mississippi and Alabama.

The BP disaster exposed not only BP's complete disregard for safety regulations, but also the Obama administration's contempt for those affected by the spill. Despite many estimates of damage as high as \$200 billion, the Obama administration agreed to a mere \$20 billion escrow fund. As of today, less than \$7 billion has been distributed to claimants, and many have been forced to waive further legal recourse.

In a further outrage, BP recently announced that it is soon to completely cease cleanup operations. The US Coast Guard has backed BP's decision, despite the appearance of new tar balls over the past month at Grand Isle, Louisiana.

Poverty and the decay of infrastructure are an ever-increasing reality of life in Louisiana. The state has a poverty rate of 19.2 per cent, the second highest in the country. While the unemployment rate of 7.2 per cent is below the national average, an estimated 35 per cent of families in Louisiana consist of parents that can only find part-time work.

Poverty is reflected acutely among youth in the state—approximately one in three children live below the poverty line. The youth of Louisiana also face the destruction of public education in favor of charter schools, which have little to no restriction on admission requirements.

Although the ruinous policies of Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, a conservative Republican, have contributed vastly to social decay, the Democrats are equally complicit. Jindal has overseen massive cuts across the board of social services. The latest round of cuts, mandated by the Louisiana House of Representatives, will total \$300 million. The bulk of these cuts are likely to fall largely on health care and higher education.

Democratic Party representatives played a pivotal role in the passage of Jindal's budget plan through the House. Many Democrats supported its passage without a shred of criticism. It is evident now more than ever how little difference exists between the two parties of big business.

Despite superficial debate, the program of both parties, at the state and federal level, is fundamentally the same: austerity, war, and the attack on democratic rights.

The SEP urges supporters and WSWS readers in Louisiana to aid in the ballot effort by contacting the SEP and getting involved in the election campaign.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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