

“I don’t think there’s a whole lot we can do unless some type of revolution kicks off”

Socialist Equality Party campaigns in Aurora, Illinois

Our reporters
31 August 2016

Last Sunday, a Socialist Equality Party campaign team visited Aurora, a city of 200,000 and the second largest in Illinois. Members of the SEP team visited the downtown area to promote Jerry White and Niles Niemuth’s presidential campaign.

Like many rustbelt regions, Aurora grew up with the economic expansion of the United States, and remained a major center of industrial production, textiles and rail transport until the 1970s.

Manufacturing and rail transport got an early start in the area. Then called the Chicago-Burlington-Quincy railroad, a line ran from Aurora to Chicago, opening a connection to Aurora and other small towns west of Chicago in the 1860s. Shortly after the Civil War, the rail line would expand westward into Iowa and beyond. It remained the city’s largest employer into the 1960s. The rail line, currently Burlington Northern-Santa Fe, is now owned by multibillionaire Warren Buffett’s Berkshire Hathaway.

Services like warehousing and distribution eclipsed manufacturing through the 1980s and 1990s, after many closures and consolidations of industrial firms. Warehousing and distribution now make up about 19 percent of occupations in the area.

But not all industry disappeared. After the school districts, Caterpillar’s wheel loader manufacturing facility is the largest employer in Aurora. As part of a multi-year downsizing plan, CAT moved production from Tongzhou, in Jiangsu province of China, to the Aurora plant without making additional hires.

Today, social inequality is painted on the face of many blocks in the city center as well as the outskirts. Amid the area’s sprawl, areas of relative wealth and desperate poverty intermingle, with the highest concentration of

poverty in the eastern central section of the city. Conditions in the schools are more like those in St. Louis or Rockford, not the affluent nearby suburbs of Naperville or Wheaton. East Aurora’s school teachers are among the lowest paid in Illinois.

Aurora, where the median age is relatively young, about 32, and where about one-third of residents are Hispanic and 11 percent are black, has one of the most diverse populations among cities in the Midwest. The city’s population has continued to grow steadily through the last several decades, based on a relatively affordable housing stock and slightly below average cost of living as an industrial satellite of Chicago, similar to other cities in Illinois like Elgin, Waukegan, Joliet and Chicago Heights.

The austerity policies of the Democratic and Republican parties have exacted their toll on the working class of the region.

Waubonsee Community College, which has a campus in downtown Aurora, has recently closed its small business development center and cut its adult education classes by 25 percent, laying off some instructors.

The few programs serving the area’s most vulnerable populations—the homeless and long-term unemployed, immigrant families and teenagers from low-income households—have been cut in the budget impasse, now in its thirteenth month.

Kurt told campaigners he is supporting Jill Stein in the presidential elections (since Senator Bernie Sanders conceded to Hillary Clinton), based largely on her position regarding the crimes committed by the state of Israel against the Palestinians.

Kurt told campaigners, “Sanders’ message can be up for debate. Was he mobilizing for anti-state action? I think probably not. He was getting more people active

and participating, and basically involved in state power.

“But I understand, as Lenin put it in *State and Revolution*, that we’re not fighting for control of the state but for the dismantling of the state.

An SEP campaigner asked Kurt how he came to read Lenin’s foundational work. He explained he read it on his own: “For me, science is the foundation for being skeptical of authority, and through that I started on that path of looking into figures that had been pushed into obscurity.”

Marlo, a painter, also spoke with the SEP campaigners about the presidential elections

On the Democratic and Republican candidates he said, “Well, I know I don’t have a lot to show up for this but, I don’t like what either of them has to say.

“I don’t think there’s a whole lot we can do unless some type of revolution kicks off. We can do this and that, and making people aware, but they’re in control right now. Unless there’s some type of coup.”

SEP supporters raised the issue of class rule imposed by the Democrats and the Republicans. One campaigner said “The Democrats don’t represent the working class.”

“No they don’t. Even Obama,” Marlo replied.

“Yeah, you know, that’s why they keep talking about the middle class and they don’t talk about the poor people. They keep trying to build up the middle class and there’s too many poor people out here. There’s a problem when you’re not talking about all people.

“...It’s slavery all over again. There’s an ideology that’s taking place, and that’s the haves and have nots. And when someone becomes one of the haves their attitude changes towards the have nots. So there’s an ideology taking place. And what my view is, is that it’s only going to get worse before something happens...I don’t know if you all are Christian, but biblically those things take place when things come to a head, at a certain point. And my expectation is that things are going to get worse before something happens.”



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