

# SEP vice presidential candidate Niles Niemuth campaigns in Pennsylvania

Evan Winters, Zac Corrigan  
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Wilksburg, Pennsylvania is an impoverished borough adjacent to the historic steel-producing city of Pittsburgh.

As a result of the collapse of the steel industry, Pittsburgh lost over 50 percent of its population since its peak of 676,000 around 1960. Wilksburg likewise has lost about half its population during this period, and lost 18 percent since 2000 alone. About 15,000 remain residents today. Per capita income in Wilksburg is just \$16,890. The poverty rate is 18.7 percent, and over 30 percent for children.

According to Department of Education figures cited in the local media, Wilksburg had 174 homeless schoolchildren in 2014. The city's only remaining middle school and high school closed in 2016 due to lack of funding tied to low enrollment. More than 200 remaining students are now sent to Westinghouse High, one of Pittsburgh's lowest-performing schools.

Niles Niemuth, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US vice president, took a campaign team to Wilksburg to bring the perspective and program of the SEP to workers and young people there, and to build for an upcoming election meeting in Pittsburgh. Niemuth talked with workers about the social conditions they face, the US elections and the danger of war.

Brian, a middle-aged worker who previously worked at the now-closed Wilksburg High School, met SEP campaigners outside the Family Dollar store. He said he was "very disheartened by the choice we have" between Clinton and Trump. "I've been a Democrat all my life," he said, "and I've never missed a vote in my life. But this is a country of 300 million people, and with all the great minds that have come out of this country, this is what we've got to choose from? I'm voting this year, but I'm not voting for either one of

them. The Clintons, they're for the rich."

Disgust with both Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump was ubiquitous in Wilksburg. Carla, an elder care worker who campaigners met at the bus stop, scowled when campaigners brought up the US presidential elections. "I don't like either of them."

Karen, a retired telecom worker also waiting for the bus, said, "I don't want to vote for any of them. It does not look good at all. Everything's just backward."

Niemuth met grocery store manager Jache Dorsey as she was taking her young son for a walk outside the closed high school. "Well, I'm definitely not voting for Trump, so I'll be voting for Clinton," she said. But when she learned that Niemuth and Jerry White were running as socialists, she wanted to know more about their platform. Jache was very worried about the world that her son would be growing up in. She said of the job situation in Wilksburg, "Honestly, people here either work fast food, or they're what I call 'street pharmacists.' People sell drugs. I'm afraid for what he [my son] will be doing when he grows up."

When Niemuth raised the danger of a major war breaking out after the elections, no matter who wins, Jache said, "It's scary. War is not something to look forward to."

A laid-off oil worker also walking home past the closed high school told campaigners, "I'm still fighting to get unemployment after being laid off for three months. The oil companies make millions of dollars every day, and when gas prices get low they just lay people off." On the question of war, he said, "It's unnecessary to have war. Whoever gets into office this year, it's going to be a trip. Trump? Hell no! With a mouth like his, you know there's going to be a war."

Niemuth explained that Hillary Clinton too has all but

promised to go to war with Russia if she's elected, boasting in a recent campaign speech that she would immediately review the US nuclear arsenal to "prepare to meet future threats," and would respond militarily even to a cyberattack.

One retired worker told Niemuth, "My son was in the Air Force for 20 years. I've been down to Walter Reed Hospital [near Washington, D.C.], and I've seen young men like you with their arms and legs blown off. But the rich don't send their sons to go fight!"

Today, September 20, at 6p.m., Niles Niemuth will be speaking at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh at 5801 Forbes Avenue. Niemuth and the SEP are building a socialist movement of the working class for social equality and against imperialist war. All those in the Pittsburgh area encouraged to attend the meeting.

For more information, see the Facebook Event Page .



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