

SEP presidential candidates to be on the ballot in Louisiana

Our reporter
26 September 2016

Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White and vice presidential candidate Niles Niemuth will appear on the Louisiana presidential ballot. This accomplishment followed efforts of SEP members in Louisiana, who traveled throughout the state's six congressional districts to get the required electors.

The SEP is not attempting to get on the ballot in other states, most of which have enormous hurdles—often tens of thousands of signatures—for independent candidates even to appear on the ballot. In many states, the SEP candidates will have official write-in status, though some states (often those with the most onerous ballot “access” laws) do not even allow write-in candidates.

Workers throughout Louisiana spoke to SEP campaigners about social conditions and voiced their dissatisfaction with both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

Randy, a foreman at a carpentry studio, expressed fear about a Trump presidency coupled with reluctant support for Clinton, but he readily agreed to be the SEP's elector for Baton Rouge.

Reporters encountered more dismay when they visited the Triple S Foodmart in North Baton Rouge, where Alton Sterling was brutally murdered by Baton Rouge police in July. Students from north Louisiana had traveled to the store in remembrance of Sterling and were eager to discuss their outrage about the epidemic of police violence and state repression. Most of them were deeply concerned with racism, though many were open to the SEP's opposition to racial politics and its call for the unification of all sections of the working class.

At the University of Louisiana in Lafayette, the SEP met with a young, unemployed man named Brock, who recounted his experiences in the protests after Sterling's death. He expressed alarm at the

militarization of police and their violent attacks against peaceful protesters. He signed on as an elector for the SEP in District 3.

From Lafayette, SEP campaigners traveled to Alexandria, where they spoke with doctors and patients about the 2014 closure of the Huey P. Long Hospital, which had been Alexandria's only charity hospital. They also visited Incarnate Word Clinic, which operates from a small, crowded building where the poor and uninsured seek medical care. One of the patients, who, at over 60 years of age works as a painter, had recently injured himself at work. He described the difficulty he and other workers face seeking medical care since the closure of the charity hospital. He stated that the same issues were common to everyone he knew.

Reporters found Incarnate Word crowded, understaffed and underfunded. Patients reported that they are often forced to visit several different sites to access care, whereas previously they could receive most of the care they needed at the hospital.

Students at Louisiana Tech University in Ruston discussed their disillusionment with presidential politics, particularly after the end of Bernie Sanders' campaign and his endorsement of Clinton.

A Louisiana Tech anesthesiology student named Dalton spoke about his anger over Sanders' support for Clinton, and about the difficulty young people have finding employment. He said he opposed US-backed wars and asserted the need for people to unify across race, gender and nationality.

In Shreveport, the SEP met with Allen, a retired lawyer who became interested in Marxism after reading about surplus value. He spoke of the need to directly address workers and tell them the truth. He agreed to sign up as the SEP's delegate in Shreveport.

As the SEP completed its ballot access work in Louisiana, the state was deluged by historic floods. Thirteen people were killed and over 20,000 were rescued from flooded homes. Over 106,000 households registered for FEMA disaster assistance. The state has still not completely recovered from the ravages of Hurricane Katrina, which inundated New Orleans and other parts of coastal Louisiana in 2005.

The state's flood abatement infrastructure is grossly inadequate to protect against predictable floods. This is exacerbated by the tolls exacted upon the coast of the state by successive oil spills. Three separate spills occurred over 10 days between July and August, adding to the damage done by the catastrophic 2010 BP/Deepwater Horizon spill.

The SEP's ballot access victory stands out against a backdrop of increasing pressures on Louisiana's working class. Police brutality and repression, environmental damage inflicted with impunity by oil companies, decreasing access to health care, inadequate infrastructure and lethargic disaster responses have pushed Louisiana workers away from the bourgeois political establishment.

The ever-growing threat of world war has also impressed itself upon Louisiana workers. The SEP's elector in District 2, a student named Larry, stated: "I decided to sign up as an elector in order to put the SEP on the ballot as a means of introducing people to the idea that there is an alternative to the capitalist system, growing poverty, misery and a stifling lack of freedom."

Daniel, the SEP's elector for District 1, said, "By offering up our own socialist candidates we begin to draw people towards a conscious rejection of imperialist slaughter, austerity and the hypocritical methods of the ruling elite. People are desperate for a way out of the current morass. Only the clarity of the Socialist Equality Party's program can provide the means for the overthrow of the entire system."



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