SEP candidates speak with voters at the polls in Michigan

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party's candidates, Jerry White for US president and Niles Niemuth for vice president, campaigned and spoke to workers at the polls in Michigan on Election Day. The candidates spoke with workers about their thoughts on the candidates and what is to come after the elections.

White campaigned in Warren, Michigan. Darlene, a health care worker, said, "The rise in health care insurance is not fair for the working class. We're busting our butts and everything is going up except our wages. The stock market keeps going up but it doesn't help us."

Asked about the endless wars being pursued by the US around the world, Darlene said, "What's it for? Instead of spending trillions on war, what about helping the homeless, the children or the vets who are living under bridges? Don't people need that more than nuclear war?"

Shannon and Tommy came to the polling station at a school in Warren, not to vote but to visit the vice principal. "We're not voting but we are concerned about what will happen after these elections," said Shannon, a health care worker. "I wish there was a 'none of the above' you could vote for on the ballot. Maybe if enough people didn't vote they would take notice."

"This is the worst election I can ever remember," said Tommy, who was injured while working at a recreational vehicle sales and repair company. "They are insulting each other, but not talking about the real issues. We're going to have to pay a fortune for our two boys to go to college and when they get out of school they're going to have to pay a fortune for their loans."

"And what about the costs of insurance going up and up?" Shannon added, "We're supposed to be middle class but we're not. We work paycheck to paycheck. We moved to Warren after he was hurt. While we were fighting for his disability check, we lost our home. I worked at an auto parts plant—Becker—that was bought by Collins & Aikman and closed. Then I worked in the billing department at a hospital. If I were to lose my job we'd lose our house again," Shannon said, as she held back her tears.

She said if she were going to vote it would have been for Trump, because he was talking about jobs. "Trump is ridiculous, I know, with this whole wall with Mexico issue. I know he's got businesses overseas too." Tommy said he was against Trump, but not for Clinton either. "It's ridiculous that Trump boasts that he hasn't paid income taxes. He should donate some of his billions to pay for schools and other things."

Shannon said she was sick of the way Clinton was saying the major problem was racism. "That's ridiculous, we had a black president for eight years."

The SEP candidate said both Clinton and Trump were trying to use racial and nationalist appeals in order to divide the working class. "The rich want black, white, immigrant and native born workers to fight each other, while they laugh all the way to the bank," White said. "We have to unite workers of every race and nationality to fight inequality and to stop wars."

Shannon said she agreed. She said both Clinton and Trump were for war—and she was against it. "Why are people still being killed for these wars and why are we paying for it? That money should be used for the people instead."

Johnny Briscoe, a retiree, was at the polling station in Warren. He said he voted for Clinton out of a lot of reluctance.

"It's the lesser of two evils," stated Briscoe, "Neither one of them are very good choices."

"My thing is that I felt I had to vote because a lot of people died for the right to vote. I couldn't just ignore that."

"During the primary I voted for Sanders. He spoke to the situation facing a lot of working people. With Clinton and Trump I feel that the election is all twisted up. You don't know which way to go because neither one of them are good choices.

Jerry White said, "You know, both Trump and Clinton are supporting wars in the Middle East and are preparing more wars. No matter who wins they are going to escalate the attacks on the working class."

In Detroit, White spoke to workers at a voting location in the Northwest side of the city.

Darrell Flournoy said, "I don't like either of them. It's like which would you prefer, the knife or poison? I was pressured by my Mom to go and vote. I said all right. But I was thinking I would just go into the booth, close my eyes and press something."

Darrell said he voted for Bernie Sanders and was disappointed when he dropped out of the race.

"I don't know who I'm going to vote for. When Sanders

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dropped out of the race I felt that I don't have a dog in this race. Both of them are really messed up."

Asked what he thought about the social conditions in the US, Darrell made it clear that he thought things were bad. "More than anything I'm concerned about jobs. I think the trade agreement that Clinton's husband signed was bad."

Darrell started working at Ford Motor Company a year ago and was hired in at the lower-tiered wage. "I hate it," he said. "I hate doing the same work at half the wage. I feel that everyone should be getting the same wage.

"Also, I don't like the policies of the UAW. A lot of the time you can't reach them. They aren't doing anything for the workers."

SEP candidate for US vice president, Niles Niemuth, visited polling locations in Southwest Detroit and the suburb of Dearborn.

Southwest Detroit is home to many immigrant workers and a former center of auto production, which has been devastated by the social crisis.

WSWS reporters found widespread disgust with both major party candidates. The first voter approached said of the election, "It is Tweedledee and Tweedledum. I had a hard time deciding."

A retired steelworker, Carson, who described himself as a Democrat and a born again Christian, said, "I don't think either one of them is fit to be president. I am going into the voting booth and I still haven't made up my mind.

"If you vote for Trump or Hillary, there is going to be a war. Trump is like a time bomb."

Asked about the record of the Obama administration, he replied, "We have had only two Social Security raises in eight years. In January we will only be getting another $5 a month. That is ridiculous."

David Llamas, a worker at the Ford Flat Rock auto factory, and his wife Kathy stopped to speak to the WSWS at some length. David told the WSWS that he had voted for Green Party candidate Jill Stein.

David said, "The main issue for me is war. Why are we invading other countries for profits, for oil?"

Asked about the war in Syria he replied, "Russia is backing [Syrian President] Assad to fight the rebels funded by the United States. We are creating another bogeyman, like in Iraq, that we will have to get rid of later."

David said he had backed Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primary and was disgusted by his subsequent endorsement of Clinton. "He is going to get something if Clinton wins. He will probably get an appointment to head the Treasury committee in the Senate."

Kathy added, "I think they [Clinton and Trump] are both garbage. I am a woman, but I will be damned if I am voting for this woman. She is going to get us all killed.

"Compared to Clinton, Trump is a lesser evil if you ask me. I am all for women's empowerment, but Clinton does everything to profit herself."

They were both interested to learn that the SEP was running candidates in the presidential election. Niles Niemuth explained that the SEP was intervening in the elections to provide a socialist alternative to the multimillionaire Clinton and the billionaire Trump. Both David and Kathy eagerly took campaign literature about the SEP campaign and said they would consider the SEP program.

The WSWS also spoke to workers and young people in the working class community of Dearborn, outside of Detroit, home to a large Arab-American population.

Several workers told the WSWS that were having a hard time deciding who to choose. "It's crazy," one worker told the WSWS, "I am walking in there and I still don't know who I am voting for."

A student from the University of Michigan told the WSWS that this was her first election and that she had voted for Clinton. However, she indicated that the issue that motivated her more than anything was animosity toward Trump, "I don't like how Trump talked about women," she said.

While she said that student loan debt was one of her biggest concerns, she expressed no confidence that either candidate, if elected, would address this issue.

Mary, an older worker, told the WSWS that while she had voted for Clinton, she had been put off by the election campaign. "I think they were more into talking about each other. You didn't hear what they stand for."

Mary's biggest concern was war. "I had many friends killed in Vietnam. For what? I can see that happening again.

"We put some leader in power, and the next thing that happens we are fighting him. There doesn't ever seem to be an end to it."

As far as the war in Syria she said, "That stuff needs to stop." She did not favor the US stoking a confrontation with nuclear armed Russia. "I don't think Russia is that big of a threat. They are not as strong as they used to be."

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