

SEP campaign in West Virginia wins over 900 votes

Naomi Spencer—SEP candidate for WV House District 16
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As the Socialist Equality Party's candidate standing in the West Virginia House of Delegates race in District 16, I am pleased to report that our campaign received 902 votes November 8, or 2.3 percent of the vote.

The total vote was split seven ways among three Democrats, three Republicans and myself. The winners were two incumbent delegates and one former delegate, all well-funded and prominent in local advertising and media coverage. I was the only alternative candidate running in the district, and one of only 18 minor party or independent candidates statewide.

The SEP put forward the only socialist option in the state. The campaign was run solely on a volunteer basis, with supporters leafleting door-to-door in neighborhoods for miles after work and on weekends. We campaigned in parking lots, at festivals, on campuses and on the streets. Numerous public meetings were held on the danger of world war, the nature of the US elections, and the need for a socialist alternative.

The campaign received no corporate donations, was virtually boycotted by the local television news, and had no endorsements from special interest groups. The socialist campaign was of an entirely different character than those of the establishment parties. Each of the 902 votes cast for the SEP in West Virginia were hard-fought and well-earned.

The vote for the SEP represents the shift to the left in working class consciousness over the past few years and a desire among millions of people for an end to war, austerity and police violence.

In articulating the real interests of the working class, the SEP campaign won a warm response from working people in West Virginia, as well as substantial support from neighboring areas of southern Ohio, Pennsylvania, Kentucky and Tennessee. Workers from all over the world sent well wishes to my Facebook

campaign page.

While petitioning to get onto the ballot, SEP campaigners spoke to thousands of people in Huntington, West Virginia. Overwhelmingly, residents felt alienated from the two corporate parties and said they did not like either presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump.

In the middle of the campaign, the SEP had to file a lawsuit to prevent the state from removing my name and the name of all independent candidates from the ballot by seeking to retroactively apply an earlier filing deadline.

The SEP campaign emphasized the need for an internationalist perspective, breaking from nationalist and localist politics, and the need for a new anti-war movement based in the working class and on a socialist program. This was received warmly by many people, particularly younger residents whose whole lives are in the shadow of the "war on terror" and who feel globally connected through the Internet.

Workers and youth again and again stated that money should be put into providing good jobs, education and health care. The social priorities expressed in the trillions of dollars spent on war and bank bailouts were those of the wealthy, not ordinary Americans. The SEP's program of "social rights"—where jobs, education, retirement and more are guaranteed to all people—was met with enthusiasm among countless workers.

In two town hall events, we articulated the need for an emergency jobs program to applause from large audiences. By contrast, the Republican and Democratic candidates proposed further tax cuts to businesses.

In a state with the worst employment participation rate and in continual danger of catastrophic flooding, there is overwhelming desire for decent jobs and safe

physical infrastructure among the population. Only the SEP connected the social devastation to the enrichment of a tiny layer of billionaires, and called for expropriation of these fortunes to be put into rebuilding society and providing good-paying jobs.

In a distorted form, the victory of Trump in Tuesday's presidential election reflected such social grievances. The Republican Party easily carried the state of West Virginia, doing best where the so-called socialist, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, swept the Democratic primaries.

Trump's win has been characterized as the result of racism and sexism among white workers. But behind the support for both Trump and Sanders was a tidal wave of anger and despair over intolerable poverty and social deterioration. Sanders support for Clinton ensured that this anger could be monopolized by the political right.

While living conditions have continued to worsen nearly a decade after the 2008 crash—reaching depression levels in several West Virginia counties—the Democrats have insisted that the economy is strong, unemployment is low, and that the main area of concern was over issues of racial and sexual identity. White workers were told they were “privileged” and that their expectation of a decent standard of living was part of the problem.

Trump based his appeal in the devastated Appalachian coalfields on a promise to bring back the coal industry and revitalize communities with jobs and money. This, like his campaign slogan promising to “Make America great again,” is a cynical fraud that will be quickly exposed by the actions of his administration.

In the absence of a socialist movement, the danger is that social opposition will be channeled behind an extreme right-wing agenda. This will expose many of the same disenfranchised and vulnerable layers of the population that voted for Trump to further economic and social victimization.

The election was not the culmination of the SEP's work in West Virginia. It was just the beginning. In the days ahead, we will be fighting to build a socialist movement of workers to fight for our real class interests. We urge all workers, youth, students, and others to join us in this struggle.



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