SEP candidate Niles Niemuth wins support from workers and youth in Ann Arbor, Michigan

Our reporter
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Socialist Equality Party candidate Niles Niemuth campaigned yesterday in Ann Arbor, Michigan, collecting signatures to get on the November 6 ballot as a candidate for Congress in the 12th district. Niemuth spoke with workers and students at the University of Michigan's Ann Arbor campus and collected more than 100 signatures in support of the campaign.

Kyle Mink, a young maintenance and sanitation worker at the supermarket chain Meijer, was one of those who signed to put Niemuth on the ballot. Before working at Meijer, Kyle was a dock worker. "I think it is fantastic that you are standing," he told Niemuth. "I've always wanted to have a movement like this. Personally, I'm now a diehard socialist. I think we should have a voice and not have everything decided by this tiny group of rich people. A lot more people need to stand up for what they believe in."

Kyle said he was "disgusted" by the mass roundups and detention of immigrants. His uncle and many of his best friends are Mexican, he said, and "they are now terrified that one of them or their friends are going to be deported. One of my friends has a friend who worked at a restaurant near here in Ann Arbor that was raided by ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement]. They are a group of thugs. He was deported. My friend is scared now, and he has children. He is a citizen, but they are now talking about taking away people who are naturalized."

Kyle said that the claim that immigrants were taking American workers' jobs was "smear propaganda." He had worked alongside many immigrants at Meijer, he said, "and they're going through the same thing as me. Once you work alongside them, you realize that we're all suffering the same thing. If we're busy fighting each other, they win."

The claim that immigrants were "criminals" was likewise a lie, he said. "We have the biggest opioid crisis on our front lawn, and the government is supposedly concerned about drug smugglers?"

Niemuth told Kyle that the Socialist Equality Party's campaign was aimed at uniting workers of all nationalities in a common struggle against both big business parties and the capitalist system. "We think workers have the right to live and work wherever they want, with full working and legal rights," Niemuth said. "This is a global phenomenon, and millions of people are fleeing around the world. The attacks on immigrants are aimed at dividing the working class. We stand for abolishing national borders and unifying the world economy on a socialist basis."

"I think open borders is wonderful," Kyle replied. "The human race should come together and solve our problems." He added that he had previously supported the campaign of Bernie Sanders in the 2016 elections. "His position on refugees is disgusting," he said. "It just shows that there are all these people claiming to represent different sides, but really they are on the same side." He now thought the Sanders campaign was another "publicity stunt," which had "achieved nothing."

"The Republicans clearly want to protect the status quo, but when I was younger I had a firm belief that the Democrats would listen. Then I realized that my opinion didn't really count as much as the people who actually bring money in. It was a sickening thought."

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As for the trade unions, Kyle said he thought they did nothing to protect workers' conditions. "I've had numerous violations by the employers, including abuse, that I've gone to the union about, and they've done nothing," he said. "It's basically just, 'Well that's the way things work.' It's a $25 fee [for dues payments], but I'd rather have that in my pocket than pay someone who's not even going to defend my interests. They're not defending anyone."

Niemuth added that the SEP was the only party standing in the elections to oppose the bipartisan program of unending US wars. Kyle replied that he remembered watching the video Collateral Murder, which was published by WikiLeaks, showing an American gunship killing Iraqi journalists and civilians. "They're killing children," he said. "And now you see what they are doing to the whistleblowers. [Former NSA contractor Edward] Snowden has had to flee the country. [Chelsea] Manning was locked up, and Assange is still imprisoned."

Kyle was not aware of the campaign by the *World Socialist Web Site* demanding freedom for Julian Assange, who remains holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, but he said, "I am behind this 100 percent. It's because there's a lot of deep secrets that they don't want to come out which are not flattering for either party. They know anyone who wants to find the truth will find ugly stuff."

Madeline, a freshman engineering student from Washington, DC, asked to sign the petition after overhearing SEP campaigners. "We've seen the Democrats oppose the Republicans on a lot of social issues like gay marriage and abortion, but both of them are on the side of capitalism that profits off the poor, right off their backs," she said. "I was scrolling through Twitter and saw Bernie [Sanders] talking about the Middle East. But he was talking about it from the same standpoint, that he would still bomb and imperialize."

Madeline is turning 18 in September. She was one year old when the September 11 terrorist attacks occurred, which were used to justify an eruption of US wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and across the Middle East and North Africa. "I've grown up with global war," she said. "I know nothing but constant conflict. This is totally unnecessary. I don't know why we're continuing the conflict. There's no reason to bomb and displace innocent people. And besides all the killing, this money could be used for so many things. Flint still needs clean water. We have to repair for [Hurricane] Maria," in Puerto Rico.

Madeline said she was particularly opposed to the mass attacks on immigrants by the Trump administration. "I think ICE should be abolished, same with Customs and Border Protection. Also they have started with the denaturalization of people who are citizens. They're carrying out raids and using scare tactics, like going into areas outside of the border zone. I saw a story on the news of a woman on a bus who had to stand up to say that ICE could not get on and take her neighbors away."

The SEP is continuing its campaign to secure ballot access in the November 6 elections on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program. We urge all those who wish to support the campaign to get involved today.

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