Notes from the campaign trail

The impact of the US-backed war in Yemen on Michigan’s 12th district

Niles Niemuth
11 July 2018

Niles Niemuth is the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for House of Representatives in Michigan's 12th congressional district. Niles is running on a socialist, anti-war and anti-capitalist program in the interests of the working class in Michigan and around the world. The SEP and its supporters are currently in the process of collecting the 3,000 signatures needed to get on the ballot.

To support and donate to the campaign, visit niles2018.com. Follow the campaign on Facebook and Twitter.

As I have traveled around Michigan’s 12th district these past weeks working with supporters to collect the thousands of signatures needed for ballot access, we have had the opportunity to engage in many important and memorable conversations with workers and young people.

Michigan’s 12th district is remarkably diverse, containing three major auto factories, a number of large and small college campuses, as well as the city of Dearborn, which is home to some 40,000 Arab Americans—more than any other American city—including a large number of Yemeni families.

Recently, while petitioning at a farmer’s market in the city of Ypsilanti, I met a young woman who was shopping with her husband and their two small daughters. I explained to her that one of the planks of my campaign platform is the call for open borders. Workers should have the right to live and work in any country they choose, I said, and all refugees from war should be welcomed with full rights.

She told me that she and her husband are from Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East and the site of an ongoing war.

Since Saudi Arabia launched the war to reinstall the US-Saudi-puppet regime in Yemen in March 2015, some 600,000 civilians have lost their lives or been injured as a result of the conflict. The destruction of industry and a naval blockade enforced by the US led to death by starvation of over 50,000 children in 2017 alone. A brutal cholera epidemic infected over one million people. The poorest country in the Arab world prior to the Saudi-led assault has been artificially pushed to brink of famine.

“I can’t even imagine what it would be like for our girls to live through what they are living through in Yemen,” the young woman said, “not knowing each night whether the bombs will fall on them. It is extremely traumatizing for the children.”

She and her husband explained that they had many family members in Yemen who are suffering the consequences of the war. When her sister recently sent photos, they could see that her lips had turned blue from malnutrition. It is not safe for them to visit their family in Yemen while the war continues. Even if they were somehow able to return to Yemen, they would run the risk of being barred reentry to the US now that the Supreme Court has upheld Trump’s travel ban, which bars Yemenis and people from six other countries from entering the United States.

I know that the difficult story of this family is the story of thousands of other Yemenis, and millions of refugees all over the world. As a writer for the WSWS, the war crimes being committed in Yemen has been one of my particular areas of concern since the war began over three years ago under the Obama administration.

Despite the immense suffering of millions of people

© World Socialist Web Site

at the hands of the US government and its allies in the Middle East, the mainstream media has virtually blacked out coverage of Yemen in order to provide a political cover for the crimes of American imperialism.

The Yemeni couple I spoke with in Ypsilanti agreed that it is the US government which is primarily responsible for the seemingly endless death and destruction in the region. I raised with them, and many others I have spoken with, the issue of the role of the Democratic Party specifically, which bears no less responsibility for the catastrophe in Yemen than the Republicans.

Under the Obama administration the US government provided Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners with bombs, military intelligence and other logistical support in its vicious air attacks. American refueling planes flew daily missions to ensure that coalition warplanes could keep pounding targets throughout the country around the clock. Yemen was just one of seven countries which were being actively bombed by Obama, who earned the distinction of being the first president to spend every day of his administration at war.

The stockpiles of weapons used to rain down terror on men, women and children in Yemen were refilled many times over by the Obama administration, which struck a 20-year, $60 billion weapons deal with Saudi Arabia in 2010, a figure which increased to $115 billion by the end of the administration. This was the largest transfer of weaponry in US history, including fighter jets and attack helicopters, until the Trump administration inked a $350 billion arms deal with the Saudi monarchs last year.

Even now the Democrats support the Trump administration’s backing of the ongoing brutal siege on the critical port city of Hodeida, which supplies 70 percent of the country’s population with food, fuel and medicine. The UN estimates that 121,000 people have already fled the besieged port city, turning them into refugees. For the more than half a million people remaining in the city, conditions are rapidly deteriorating, with food in short supply, prices for staple goods skyrocketing, and blackouts occurring weekly if not daily.

My opponent in the race to represent the 12th district, Democrat Debbie Dingell, is implicated in these crimes against humanity as an enthusiastic supporter of American militarism. Dingell recently joined Senate and House Democrats in voting overwhelmingly to approve the Trump administration’s latest military budget, which includes $719 billion for the Department of Defense, and an expansion of the US nuclear arsenal.

Workers and youth who are looking for a political strategy to put an end to war and defend the rights of immigrants and refugees will find no way forward in the Democratic Party--the same party which bears a heavy responsibility for the creation of the current crisis in Yemen and across the Middle East.

I believe that in order to put an end to the assault on Yemen a new international movement against war, uniting the great mass of working people and youth in opposition to capitalism and imperialism, must be built on an anti-capitalist and socialist basis.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on all workers and youth who agree with this program to contact us and join Niles' campaign today, visit Niles2018.com to sign up and donate. Follow the campaign on Facebook and Twitter.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site