

Notes from the campaign trail

Over a thousand signatures from workers attending Wyandotte, Michigan art fair

Niles Niemuth
13 July 2018

Niles Niemuth is the SEP's candidate for Congress in Michigan's 12th Congressional District. To get involved in the campaign and donate, visit niles2018.com.

Over the last two days, Socialist Equality Party campaign teams received over a thousand signatures supporting my right to be on the ballot in Michigan's 12th Congressional District. The signatures were gathered from workers attending the 57th annual Wyandotte Street Art Fair. The overwhelming support is another indication of the radicalization of workers and youth and the growing interest in socialism among large sections of the population.

Thousands of workers from throughout the region attended the event, which continues into the weekend, bringing together artists from across the state and other parts of the country. Many of them spoke to our campaign team about the conditions in their workplaces, the bankruptcy of the Democrats and the need for socialism.

Shortly after arriving at the fair on Thursday, a woman eagerly rushed over to sign my petition when I asked her to support putting a socialist on the ballot for Congress. When I asked what made her sign so quickly, she replied, "Well, capitalism has failed, hasn't it? We definitely need socialism."

Another worker who lives in Wyandotte hesitated to sign, telling me he was a "lifelong Democrat." I asked him to consider what the Democrats had done for him and other workers like him in his lifetime. He thought for a few seconds, really considering the question before replying, "Nothing," and then signing my petition.

Our petitioners spoke to workers from different lines

of work, young and old, and of various ethnicities and backgrounds. Across the board, we found deeply felt hostility to the entire political establishment.

Mark, a retired marketing specialist from Trenton, signed our petition because he believes in Socialism. "Socialism is politics and agencies and people working for the people. It's not the bad word or bad political philosophy that those on the right make it out to be."

Mark was very opposed to the massive military spending, totaling some \$700 billion each year. "We should use that money to save homes from foreclosure, to help people who are drowning in debt that they were wrangled into by the corporations. The student loan situation is an absolute farce and a travesty. There's so much that could be done with that money: schools, healthcare..."

Speaking out against the nationalist rhetoric of the Trump administration, Mark explained, "I don't buy into this 'America First' routine. It's absolute nonsense. America First in what sense? We live in a global economy, a global social scene, and the whole world is teetering."

He added before heading into the fair that he was glad to see so many young people from our campaign out fighting for what we believe in. "We need more of that," he said.

Some of our other petitioners helping the campaign spoke to youth from the area about the conditions facing their generation. Ruth, a student at Wayne State University studying math, told us that she is from Lincoln Park, a nearby city also in District 12. She explained, "The kind of jobs that are available for young people are food service, like Dairy Queen, customer service type of stuff," which do not offer

young people a very promising future.

Campaigners explained that the Detroit area once had the highest standard of living in the world, based on the struggles of autoworkers for decent wages and working conditions. Ruth replied, “Detroit isn’t considered the auto center of the world, or even of America, in the way that it used to be. My dad is a semi-truck driver, and his work is very related to the auto industry here. There were some years where he was bouncing around from job to job because he couldn’t make ends meet.”

Like Ruth’s parents, many workers in the area are from a generation that moved from the city of Detroit to the “Downriver” area for job opportunities. Many of these cities are largely made up of white workers. They are part of the section of the working class that Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party has slandered as racist and reactionary, responsible for Clinton’s defeat in the 2018 election.

Our experience in Wyandotte, speaking to hundreds of workers from Downriver, proves once again the anti-working-class character of the Democratic Party.

Melanie, a young retail worker from Wyandotte, explained, “Downriver is mostly working-class people. It was more middle class before the recession in 2009. Formerly, there were white collar jobs around here where you could make \$30 an hour with benefits, but now you’re looking at \$12 an hour as an independent contractor with no benefits for the same job. These are jobs that people used to make into a long-term career, but now you can make more money waitressing and bartending.”

Melanie told us that she signed the petition “because the US is supposed to be a democratic country, but honestly we’re not. We only have two main political parties, and both of them are funded and supported by the same banks and corporations. It’s an illusion of choice. If we really did have free, fair elections, anyone could run, and funding wouldn’t be an issue. When we elect our legislators, they should be focused on doing their job instead of building their war-chest for the next election.”

Like many workers, Melanie is concerned about many issues. She spoke to us about the importance of education and the starving of funds for social needs. “Having an educated, healthy population is really essential. You have a situation where someone has to call in sick for their waitressing job, but they can’t

afford to go a day without pay so they come in and they spread the flu. The way our system is set up, there’s no financial incentive for political parties to support the working class.”

Regarding falling wages, worsening working conditions and cuts to social programs, she said, “I believe a revolution is inevitable if things keep going the way they are. You can only put so many straws on the camel’s back before the camel decides to kick you!”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact