

Notes from the campaign trail

SEP volunteers in Michigan speak on powerful support from workers for a socialist perspective

Our reporters
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This is the second part in a two-part article (Part One). To sign up to get involved in the SEP campaign, visit niles2018.com

Dozens of supporters and members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) have collected thousands of signatures to place Niles Niemuth on the ballot for Michigan's 12th congressional district. All the signatures will be submitted today in Lansing, Michigan.

Over the course of the last five weeks, teams have campaigned throughout the district, speaking to tens of thousands of people. The campaign has evoked popular interest among workers, students and young people looking for a socialist alternative to the two corporate-controlled parties.

A few volunteers have taken the time to reflect on their experience so far and why they decided to get involved.

Andrea, who joined the SEP two years ago, traveled to Michigan and campaigned for Niles across Wayne and Washtenaw counties. He commented, "The main conclusion I have drawn from this experience is that the US working class is hungry for an alternative to capitalism and to the political straitjacket of the bipartisan system and institutions controlled by the ruling class.

"The response to building an independent political party and movement of workers and youth was very positive, with many workers denouncing the marching orders from their trade unions to either back Trump or the Democratic Party, who are widely held responsible for attacks against their access to health care, public

education, transportation and other social rights."

Like many of the other petitioners, Andrea noted that autoworkers responded strongly to the campaign. Many of them were familiar with the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* and its exposures of the UAW.

"I met one Flat Rock worker who has been following our coverage of the death of Jacoby Hennings," Andrea said. "He told me he was from a whole line of autoworkers stretching back to his grandfather, and that his son would likely be one too. He was visibly upset after recalling the story of Jacoby and said, 'I shudder to think that my son could meet the same fate as young Hennings because of how badly the young workers are treated these days.'" He signed the petition along with his wife.

Michael, a 26-year-old electrician, joined the petition campaign teams in Ann Arbor and Wyandotte. Michael has been reading the *World Socialist Web Site* for five years.

"I came out to petition, because I knew that I had to do something. I'm a socialist and want to make a difference. I'm tired of seeing things the way they are—everyday! Without a second thought, I decided to join the campaign.

"Niles is a genuine socialist, as is the Socialist Equality Party. I want people to hear the other side on a larger stage. People need to see other options, because I think the Democrats and Republicans are liars and criminals. Since I've been alive, I've seen nothing but war, lack of jobs, and suffering on every level. I've heard nothing but promises and prayers from the so-

called representatives of the people. Like when Obama said he would shut down Guantanamo. I was 16 and rather naïve; I thought he would at least fulfill that. He did the opposite.

“Obama deported 2.7 million immigrants. He carried out drone assaults on innocent civilians as well as American citizens. They say one thing and do another, and it gets worse every term. Now Trump is on a whole new level.

“A lot of people signed and said, ‘Heck yes, we need another voice.’ I got really good responses from young people. A young woman told me she was a socialist, and encouraged others walking by to sign as well. At the very least, the majority who signed agreed with our right to be on the ballot.”

Sam Wayne is a third-year undergraduate from Ann Arbor, Michigan who joined the SEP this year.

“These last few weeks have been pretty amazing. I talked to thousands of people from the area and heard so many incredible stories.”

Sam recalled a memorable conversation he had with a woman named Rachel who described her housing as “nontraditional.” (Rachel later explained to Sam that she was homeless.) “After signing the petition, she told me that she had voted for Trump in the last election. I respectfully asked her why, and she explained that she believed Trump would take better care of American citizens. I told her that as socialists, we’re calling for workers from every country to come together and fight for our common interests as the international working class. I was surprised to hear her say, ‘You know what, I agree with that!’

Sam explained an important realization he came to while speaking to Rachel, “I realized that Rachel, and probably many others who voted for Trump, don’t actually have a deep-rooted hatred for immigrants. When you explain the real reasons for the declining living and working conditions for Americans—which come out of the crisis of the capitalist system—you’ll realize that many workers can see through the right-wing scheme of immigrant-scapegoating.”

Sam said that when he explained the party’s internationalist position to workers in the district he found that, by and large, not only did workers agree with the position, they seemed to be genuinely inspired by it.

“I loved hearing from workers that they agree that

workers in this country have the same fundamental interests as workers around the world. That kind of thinking completely challenges the whole capitalist order and the division of workers by nationality.”

Sam was also struck by his experiences talking to youth while petitioning, “It was really great to see how many students and young people want to get involved with this campaign. We’re definitely starting to see a major shift in political attitudes as more and more young people are forced to adapt to precarious working and living conditions.

“It was kind of sad to hear someone my age describe the ‘adventurous lifestyle changes’ he had to make in order to manage his crippling student loan debt, which he was struggling to pay off with a starvation-wage job and supplementary gig-based income. I think a lot of young people realize that they can’t really ‘dress up’ our generation’s declining living standards. The reality is, our generation is doing much worse than our parents’ generation. I talked to dozens, if not hundreds, of young people in the Ann Arbor and Downriver areas, and in those conversations, I often found a serious resolve to fight for change.”

“Overall this experience was a real eye-opener for me, and it’s made me even more convinced that this campaign is unlike any other. This is about a real fight for change—a break from the capitalist system and the fight for socialism!”

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