

Notes from the campaign trail

Growing interest in socialism in Downriver Detroit area

A reporting team
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Niles Niemuth is the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Congress in Michigan's 12th Congressional District. The campaign will be holding a meeting on Thursday, August 23, 7:00 pm at the Brownstown Community Center. Visit niles2018.com to donate and get involved in the campaign.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party campaigned throughout the Downriver area of Michigan's 12th District last week to promote an upcoming meeting at the Brownstown Community Center. Downriver, which is the unofficial name of 18 suburban Michigan cities and townships in Wayne County, has been politically dominated by the Democratic Party for many decades. It is the core of the political fiefdom of the Dingell family, which has held a congressional seat based in the Downriver towns for more than 80 years.

During the 2016 elections, masses of workers stayed away from the polls, disgusted by both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Voter turnout in the Downriver area decreased in every township by figures ranging from about 2 percent in Taylor to as much as 22 percent in River Rouge. Under these conditions, Trump was able to edge out an electoral college victory in Michigan, despite the fact that during the primaries the state went to Bernie Sanders, who postured as a socialist.

The current Dingell, Debbie, is the multi-millionaire wife of former Representative John Dingell. An heiress to the Fisher Brothers auto fortune and a former lobbyist for the auto bosses before she became one of their representatives in Congress, Dingell's real constituency is the financial aristocracy, along with the upper-middle class and union bureaucracy, a tiny fraction of the population of the district.

Contrary to the corporate politicians and the media, which present white workers as reactionary and racist, our campaigners found warm support for a socialist alternative. In the city of Wyandotte, many small shop and restaurant owners put up posters in their front windows announcing the meeting, while any others took flyers to display to their customers.

When approached by SEP campaigners, a young Wayne State University student studying anthropology at first said she had no time for politics, since she also worked a minimum wage job. SEP campaigners explained this was precisely the situation facing an entire generation of young people. The fight against precarious employment is tied to an economic system in which a US CEO's compensation is 312 times greater than the average worker's. This means that the typical CEO of a large firm makes in a single day almost as much as the typical worker earns in an entire year.

Karen, an artist and mother of two young children, said she was very open to socialism. "I became so disgusted and disheartened by the politics of both the Democrats and Republicans that I could hardly bring myself to vote in 2016. I supported Bernie Sanders because I thought he was a socialist, but I was very disappointed when he threw his support to Clinton."

Karen added that she thought the fight between Trump and the Democrats over the issue of Russia was more about "in-fighting between them, and not about anything that concerns us." She expressed interest in the fight for the freedom of Julian Assange and the Flint water crisis and purchased pamphlets explaining the SEP's analysis and program.

TJ was eager to speak with SEP campaigners and said

he could not bring himself to vote for either Clinton or Trump. He is a firefighter and said he was very aware of the recent tragic house fire in Lincoln Park, which killed three people and destroyed a home and a family.

Campaigners canvassed the neighborhood of Lincoln Park, speaking with residents living near where the fire took place. While the exact cause remains unknown, it is highly likely that the age and structure of the 100-year old home, with an aging electrical system, played a role.

The community's residents take enormous pride in their homes and neighborhoods, but they struggle financially from week to week and cannot put aside funding to update electrical systems. An older resident in the neighborhood said she helps one daughter who works 12-hour shifts by babysitting the children during the day, and she assists another daughter with twins who is medically disabled and unable to work.

One immigrant couple in the neighborhood, Felipe and Maria, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* at length about the impact of the crisis, particularly on immigrant workers. They previously lived in southwest Detroit and moved to Lincoln Park three years ago. They came to the United States to work, and have not encountered racist attitudes from most people, although occasionally people will ask about their speaking Spanish.

They said they live close to Dearborn, and they said anyone should be able to speak Arabic or Spanish or any other language. "If it's the language you are comfortable speaking, what's wrong with speaking it?" Maria said. "What does it matter? Everyone should be able to speak whatever language they want and live their own lives."

Felipe previously worked in a manufacturing plant which had good working conditions, but the plant went bankrupt and he lost his job. He was denied unemployment pay because the company said he had not worked long enough to earn it.

Campaign teams also visited locations near the Great Lakes Steel plant, where a recent explosion injured 15 workers. They spoke with active and retired workers from the plant. There was also a highly successful campaign at an Amazon warehouse facility in Brownstone Township, which has just opened. Many workers took flyers and expressed interest, both in the SEP election campaign and in the SEP's effort to unite

UPS, Amazon and other warehouse and distribution workers in a common struggle against these corporate giants.



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