

Socialist Equality Party candidate Niles Niemuth speaks at election meeting in Brownstown, Michigan

Tom Hall
25 August 2018

Niles Niemuth, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Congress in Michigan's 12th District, spoke to a well-attended meeting Wednesday in Brownstown, a suburb of Detroit in the Downriver area. The meeting was attended by supporters from throughout southeastern Michigan, who were eager to help with Niles's campaign.

While building for the meeting the previous week, SEP campaigners encountered a warm reception and a growing interest in socialism in the predominantly working-class region, which has been devastated by plant closures and layoffs over the past four decades.

"We are running a different type of election campaign," Niles said in his opening remarks. "I am running for Congress in Michigan's 12th district as a member of the Socialist Equality Party to help spearhead the fight for an independent revolutionary movement of workers and young people that takes direct aim at the capitalist system under conditions of unprecedented inequality, the danger of world war and the racist assault on immigrants and refugees."

Niles connected the social issues facing the working class in southeastern Michigan to the struggles of workers throughout the world and the failure of American and world capitalism. He noted that Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, whose company operates facilities in and around the 12th district, "[saw] his fortune rise by \$50 billion in 2018—enough to pay a bonus of \$100,000 to each of the company's more than half a million workers worldwide."

He also pointed to the role of the United Auto Workers, which is embroiled in an expanding bribery scandal, and the trade unions in general, in facilitating this transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich by enforcing the slashing of wages for new hires demanded by Obama in the 2009 bailout of the auto industry.

Niles cited the still-unexplained death of young part-time autoworker Jacoby Hennings in the union office at Ford's Woodhaven Stamping plant, only a few miles away from the meeting room. "My campaign has raised the call for a public

inquiry into Hennings' death to determine what exactly led to this young man's death. Ford, the UAW, the Democrats and the Republicans have ignored this case ... Hennings' loved ones and all of his co-workers deserve a full accounting of what happened to him."

The growth of extreme inequality, he explained, was what was behind the breakdown of democracy in the United States, demonstrated above all by the Trump administration. "The rise of billionaire real estate developer and reality TV charlatan Donald Trump to the presidency represents the open rule of the oligarchy," Niles said. "He is the stinking byproduct of endless wars abroad, endless police killings, endemic poverty, stagnant and declining wages, deindustrialization and a raging opioid crisis; all of which is underwritten by ever rising levels of social inequality, among the highest in the world."

However, the Democrats present no alternative to Trump, Niles said. He noted that "[the Democrats] are running a record number of former CIA, State Department and military members for office in the November midterms."

Figures such as Bernie Sanders, together with various pseudo-left outfits such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), he noted, work to corral the growth of left-wing sentiment back behind the Democratic Party. "These fake socialists combine promises of mild social reforms with the defense of the Democratic Party, a right-wing party which has overseen the historic transfer of wealth from the working class to the rich, unending war, and unprecedented attacks on immigrants," he noted. "The disgust that millions of workers and young people are feeling towards both parties will take new and much more radical forms in the coming months."

"Genuine socialism is revolutionary," Niles continued. "The rights of the working class will be won not through an appeal to the morality of the modern-day robber barons, but through a direct assault on the very foundations of the capitalist system."

A socialist program, he explained, means an end to imperialist war, the ending of all deportations and the unification of workers of all nationalities, the establishment of workplace democracy through the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of and in opposition to the trade unions, and the creation of a workers government – “that is, a government of the working class, by the working class and for the working class, which will implement the socialist policies that are required to meet the needs of working people.”

A lively discussion with the audience followed Niles’ remarks. Nabeel, who met SEP campaigners last month outside of a Bernie Sanders rally in Detroit, asked, “I think there are people who share our interests but get sucked into the DSA thing because they’ve got glitz and glamor. How can we show those people the light, to show people that they’re not the real socialists, and bring them onto our side?”

Niles explained that it was not only the SEP that has recognized the growing support for socialism. “The Democratic Party recognizes it too. Sanders, who had been saying the same things for thirty years, was the unexpected beneficiary of this growth in anti-capitalist sentiment. But his role was to channel support back behind Clinton, a candidate diametrically opposed to what they stood for.” The task of the genuine socialists, he answered, was to expose these political frauds and to patiently explain to workers and young people what these forces really represent.

Further discussion raised issues such as the campaign of DSA member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the perspective of pressure politics, the importance of the lessons of the history of the socialist movement, and the need to use Niles’ campaign to bring the SEP’s genuine socialist program to a broader audience.

Among those who attended the meeting was Grace, a graduate student studying American history from the University of Michigan. She first met the SEP during the petition campaign to gather signatures to place Niles on the ballot at a rally to defend immigrants in Ann Arbor where the party had a large presence. “At first when I started reading the World Socialist Web Site, I could see it was sort of a world outlook, and I was saying to myself, ‘Is this actually real? Are these guys for real?’ I agreed with what I read, but I wanted to see for myself, so I came to the meeting.”

“But then seeing people actually fight for these positions at the meeting, seeing it in practice, it makes way more sense. I think it was a good meeting. I liked the answer Niles gave to my question about how we should answer those like the DSA who argue that the reason they run as Democrats is ‘that we have to fight to make them accountable.’”

Niles had explained that the Democratic Party and its defenders will never be accountable to anyone except the capitalist class. He asked the audience to consider why figures such as Ocasio-Cortez are members of the Democratic Party, a party supported by the financial elite, which has waged unending wars, carried out the deportation of immigrants, and facilitated the massive transfer of wealth from the working class to the wealthy under the Obama administration.

“We cannot go to the Democratic Party and expect that any of the attacks facing working people will be stopped,” Grace concluded. “More people need to see that the SEP is an independent party with a historical foundation.”

Nabeel, who had campaigned for Democratic gubernatorial candidate Abdul El-Sayed, explained what brought him to the meeting. “[Last month], I had been suckered into the whole pseudo-left thing. I was on board with the DSA, [Alexandria] Ocasio-Cortez, and Bernie. Two of your members were handing out materials for the SEP and I was kind of interested. I asked if they were like the DSA and they said no.”

“It all hit me the minute El-Sayed lost, and immediately endorsed Gretchen Whitmer,” Nabeel said, referencing the Democratic gubernatorial candidate who is backed by the health insurance conglomerate Blue Cross Blue Shield. “He followed the same path that Bernie did when he lost, endorsing Clinton. Whitmer is not for raising the minimum wage; she’s a typical corporate Democrat. Abdul is saying he’s against the corporations, then says to vote for Whitmer. I was heartbroken, and that’s what woke me up. I thought, ‘Maybe they [the SEP] were right. Maybe what they were saying was true.’”

“I think the most important thing is to get the truth out to the working class. The Democrats and pseudo-left try to use identity politics to divide the working class and say the problem is straight white men, including poor straight white men. Then the Republicans say it is immigrants. Both are trying to protect the interests of the corporations. Socialists are the only ones trying to say the truth: It’s not because of immigrants or white people; it is about capitalism. The system is the problem, predicated solely on profit and greed and the exploitation of the working class.”

Nabeel said it was a “huge wake-up call finding the SEP. I’m very happy for that to have happened and I feel lucky to know now that the DSA are not real socialists.”



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