

Notes from the campaign trail

SEP candidate speaks with incoming students at Wayne State University in Detroit

Niles Niemuth
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Yesterday I was invited by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) club at Wayne State University to speak with students attending FestiFall, an annual day introducing campus life to incoming students.

The campaign team and I spoke with hundreds of students about my campaign for Congress in Michigan's 12th District, about socialism, and about the fight against war and social inequality. There was widespread interest in socialism and hostility to both capitalist parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. Many students approached our stall because they saw the word "socialist" or wanted to look at and purchase the IYSSE's literature on the history of the socialist movement.

Many students told us that they preferred socialism to capitalism. A Gallup poll released this month found that fewer than half of young people in the US aged 18-29 have a positive view of capitalism, but more than half support socialism.

An incoming first-year engineering student, Paige, eagerly signed up to join the IYSSE and told us that she thought "socialism is the closest thing to my beliefs." She said that "since I've been a kid, I always thought it was messed up that there are people with no food or water or homes, that some people don't have things like that. Then I got to high school and learned about socialism and communism. If you're going to have a society it should be for the people and not profit."

The world today, however, "is the exact opposite, in America especially. A lot of people suffer because of not having enough money."

Like many students, Paige was hostile to both the Democratic and Republican parties. "It's hard to

differentiate between them," she commented. "The Democrats have a lot of imperialistic qualities." The Democrats' "anti-Russian mindset they're promoting now is very dangerous. Personally, I think that even if there was a point in time where Russia did interfere, it's used as a scapegoat."

Paige followed the campaign of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America who won a Democratic Party primary in New York City for Congress in June. This weekend, Paige said she saw Cortez's statements praising Republican Senator John McCain, who died on Saturday. "I was kind of sad," Paige said. "I liked Cortez. She seemed different. She didn't have to say anything. A lot of people who looked up to her don't feel that way. She also changed her website and removed a part that had said she was against war."

Victor, a Puerto Rican first-year student, approached our table and told me why he wanted to sign up for the IYSSE: "I'm a communist. My belief comes from hatred of capitalism and the way corporations leech from the working class. I believe the establishment of a society without corporations and without money will lead to equality."

Victor said he had begun thinking about socialism when he was a sophomore in high school. His history teacher "got me interested in the fight against wealth inequality. There are these conglomerates that destroy developing nations, suck out the money and store it at the top."

He then did his own research. "I read the Communist Manifesto, other online sources, and Wikipedia. I read about Leon Trotsky," he added, pointing to the literature on our table on Trotsky. "He was for the

international revolution while Stalin said communism should just be in one state. I like Trotsky.”

Victor told me about his own experiences during and after Hurricane Maria in his home city of San Juan. “The response was horrible,” he said. “We didn’t have power for three months. We didn’t see a single piece of support. The supermarkets ran out of food on day three. For the first month, there was a curfew at 8:00 p.m., and if you were out you were arrested.”

Victor asked many questions about my campaign’s policies. He asked what my attitude was to supporting US “soft power” aid programs overseas and the Trump administration’s threats to cut funding for the State Department.

I explained that the State Department and outfits such as the United States Agency for International Development were agencies of imperialism, used not to assist the working class of other countries, but to advance the predatory interests of the American banks and corporations, and to serve as fronts for the operations of the US intelligence agencies. A socialist policy, I said, is based on the strategy of world socialist revolution, uniting the working class in every country in a struggle against capitalism.

Nick, 18, told us he did not know much about socialism but was looking for all the political clubs around the campus, and that “this one caught my eye, because the banner says, ‘genuine socialism is international.’”

“The way I see it,” he explained, “if we look at it as not being from another country, but that everyone is a human, it would be much better. Everyone should have the same opportunity as others. It’s shameful that our leaders don’t see it the same way and attack other people and say they don’t deserve opportunities.”

“Instead of war and violence we should be working together. I wonder whether these wars are about becoming the most powerful and most wealthy country. When you have the most money you have the most power. The rich are the ones benefiting from this and the working people are not.”



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