

Socialist Equality Party congressional candidate Niles Niemuth speaks to students and youth at Wayne State University

Tom Hall

22 September 2018

Niles Niemuth, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Congress in Michigan's 12th district, spoke to a well-attended meeting at Detroit's Wayne State University on Thursday.

Throughout the previous week, Niles campaigned on campus for the meeting with supporters and members of the Wayne State chapter of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, the youth movement of the SEP. In particular, Niles won an important response from students while campaigning at Wayne State's Civics Day the previous Monday.

A broad range of students and young people were represented at the meeting. Both IYSSE members and youth who are new to socialist politics, attended the meeting. The conversation, which was far-ranging and continued in side discussions after the formal close of the meeting, reflected a growing interest in socialist politics and the history of the socialist movement. The discussion which followed Niles' opening remarks focused on what a workers' government would look like and how it could be established, and on the danger a new world war.

"We are running a different type of election campaign," Niles explained. "This campaign's purpose is not to win a single seat in Congress but to build the international socialist movement. With a noticeable growth in interest in socialism and a growing anti-capitalist sentiment, it is necessary to bring an alternative to the working class and young people in Michigan's 12th district, across the US and internationally, and to develop this interest into a conscious political movement."

"There is no genuine socialist movement in the world outside of the Socialist Equality Party. We are building a political movement to give expression to the interests of the working class. This is a movement of, by and for the working class," Niles continued.

Niles noted that this year's midterm elections were taking place in the shadow of the 10th anniversary of the 2008 financial crisis. The so-called "recovery," he argued, "has been a systematic effort to utilize the crisis triggered by the criminal actions of Wall Street bankers and speculators to restructure the economy for the benefit of the financial oligarchs and at the expense of the working class ... In 2008, the 400 wealthiest people in America had a net worth of \$1.5 trillion. That figure

has since doubled to nearly \$3 trillion." The \$1.5 trillion Trump tax cuts, he explained, were a continuation and deepening of the policies pursued by Bush and Obama a decade ago.

"At the same time recent reports indicate that there has been an explosion in "vehicular homelessness" in the US, workers at places like Amazon are living in their cars because they cannot afford housing costs on their current wages," he added.

Five years after the forced bankruptcy of Detroit, basic infrastructure in Southeast Michigan has been left to rot. "Here in Detroit teachers, children and staff members started the school year by learning that their drinking water had been contaminated by lead and copper," Niles continued. "Meanwhile the state legislature passed a bill this year which will hand \$618 million in public tax subsidies to the billionaire CEO of Quicken Loans Dan Gilbert to develop four properties in Detroit's downtown core."

The worsening conditions facing workers, Niles explained, has created a surging interest in socialism. "There is, however, only a limited understanding of what socialism really means and how it can be obtained. As such, it is susceptible to being misguided and suppressed, as the capitalist ruling elites advance their plans for war and dictatorship."

Niles pointed in particular to the role played by figures such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member and Democratic congressional nominee in New York City, in disrupting and disorienting the growing move to the left by workers and young people. "The DSA, which is a faction of the Democratic Party, not an independent party, promotes the fiction that the interests of workers can be secured without a frontal attack on the domination and wealth of the corporate and financial elite. It advances the lie that workers can win their rights through the instrument of the Democratic Party—a right-wing, pro-capitalist party."

"We aim in this campaign to answer the question what socialism really is and differentiate ourselves from those who cloak themselves with the word in order to deceive workers and young people and prevent a genuine socialist opposition from developing in this country."

“Genuine socialism is revolutionary,” he explained. “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.”

“The Socialist Equality Party is spearheading the fight to arm the developing objective movement of workers and youth with an uncompromising revolutionary program and perspective.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to attendees following the meeting.

Victor is a freshman at Wayne State. He met the IYSSE at the first student club day of the semester and has been attending weekly IYSSE meetings at Wayne this semester. Victor is from San Juan, Puerto Rico and lived with his family through Hurricane Maria last year, which killed at least 3,000 people.

Victor said that he was angered by the massive wealth piled up by the ruling elite, such as Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos' \$150 billion fortune, while the victims of natural disasters such as Hurricane Maria or the more recent Hurricane Florence have been abandoned. He noted that there was no reason that the massive resources of the military, as well as Amazon, could not be used in a rational way for real disaster relief.

He also said that he had questions about socialism and what it means in comparison to communism, by which he understands a future stateless society. He said that so far he has learned that socialism is the necessary step on the road to communism, in which the working class seizes state power and puts an end to the rule of the capitalists, so that it can begin the process of building a rational society with no class divisions.

Vincent is from Quebec and is currently working an internship in Detroit. He saw a poster for the meeting while riding his bike through campus and was intrigued by a meeting with a socialist candidate.

He participated in the 2012 province-wide student strike in Quebec, which lasted for six months. The strike was brutally suppressed by the provincial Liberal government of Jean Charest, which arrested 3,000 students and eventually passed a law making the strike illegal. While Vincent said that the strike yielded some minor reductions to tuition payments, he felt that their main goal had not been achieved, and that the Parti Quebecois, which the strike leaders promoted as an alternative to the Liberals, had done nothing for students. “What we wanted was free tuition available to all,” he said. SEP members raised with him about the role of the unions in isolating the strike and ensuring its defeat, and the SEP's call for forming rank and file committees independent of the unions.

Josh, a supporter of the SEP, came to the meeting with his friend **Luke**. Josh found out about the party through the *World Socialist Web Site* during high school in 2009 when he became interested in socialism, and found the WSWS to be the “most comprehensive” news source and a more reliable source of information than pseudo-left websites such as Socialist Worker, which is run by the International Socialist Organization.

Luke explained that he began reading the website even

though he was not initially sympathetic to socialism, but eventually changed his mind because of the WSWS' analysis and after seeing the documentary *Tsar to Lenin* which explains the history of the Russian Revolution through actual film footage of the great events of 1917.

Luke dropped out of college at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti because he could no longer afford it. He is currently unemployed outside of occasional work on the Amazon website Mechanical Turk, which crowd sources labor performed over the internet. He explained that he typically makes \$20-30 in an 8-hour work day, and that on a good day he can make \$5 an hour, far below federal minimum wage.

Alexandria is a freshman from Rochester Hills. As a high school student during the 2016 elections she had heard the term “socialism” being used but confessed that she did not understand what it meant. She said her friends equated socialism with the Stalinist dictatorships in Eastern Europe but that she was not convinced by their explanation. “My friends were unable to define what socialism is, it seemed sort of abstract.” She came to the meeting to learn more about what socialism really meant. “I don't know everything now, but it's clear that it's about the working class and them asserting their rights,” she said after the meeting. She added that she was interested in learning more about the socialist movement.



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