

Carl Cooley: 1927-2018

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12 October 2018

Carl Cooley, a member of the Socialist Equality Party (US) and the party's candidate in Maine's 2nd Congressional District in 2004, has died after a long illness. Comrade Cooley was 91 years old. He is survived by his wife Josephine, three children and three grandchildren.

Cooley, a former autoworker and high school and college teacher, had considered himself a socialist for most of his adult life. Amidst the political confusion produced by the crimes of Stalinism and the treachery of the trade unions, however, he did not find his way to the Trotskyist movement until relatively late in life.

Carl Cooley was born in Camden, New Jersey on May 21, 1927. He moved as a young boy to Oklahoma, where he attended the University of Tulsa and spent his teenage years. After a brief stay in Chicago as a young man, he moved to New York in 1950. It was there that he became convinced of the need for socialism, a conviction to which he remained true for the rest of his life.

Carl moved originally in Communist Party circles and was a member of the CP for several years in the mid-1950s. This was the period during which the American Stalinist party was shattered by the Khrushchev revelations of some of Stalin's crimes, and by the brutal crushing of the Hungarian Revolution. Carl, inexperienced politically, drifted away from the CP in the ensuing years.

Meanwhile, he had begun working at the General Motors Chevrolet plant in North Tarrytown, New York in 1955, and he remained there for the next 12 years. He remembered vividly how the Stalinists all but abandoned any work at the plant, giving no advice or direction, as they worked to adapt to the union bureaucracy and to the Democratic Party in the days of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

Cooley returned to school while continuing work at the auto plant, and he began teaching in the New York

City schools in the late 1960s. By the mid-1970s he had become increasingly disillusioned, politically disoriented amidst the collapse of the antiwar protest movement and the beginning of the rightward shift by both parties that would continue to the present day. Carl and his family moved to rural Maine in 1977. He continued to teach for several years at nearby Unity College, and later became a sheep farmer.

Cooley discovered the *World Socialist Web Site* soon after it was launched 20 years ago. In the period after the 9-11 terrorist attacks and amid the buildup to the imperialist invasion of Iraq in 2003 he became a regular reader and soon joined the Socialist Equality Party.

Carl found in the daily articles and longer documents published on the WSWS the answers to many questions that had consumed him for decades, including the fate of the Russian Revolution and the role of liberalism and the Democratic Party. He studied and came to agree with the Trotskyist movement's analysis of both the role of Stalinism and the fatal class limitations of the New Left and the middle-class protest politics of the 1960s.

Although well into his 70s and relatively isolated politically, Carl undertook active work as a socialist. He and his wife Josephine welcomed SEP supporters who came to Maine for discussion and political activity. Carl corresponded with and met readers of the WSWS from Maine and did political work with other local SEP supporters at the Orono campus of the University of Maine and elsewhere.

Carl was politically invigorated by the growth in readership and influence of the WSWS and was eager to bring the program of socialism to workers and young people. In 2004, he ran as the SEP's candidate in the sprawling 2nd District, covering the northern and eastern part of the state and including the cities of Lewiston and Bangor, the second- and third-largest in Maine.

The district, afflicted by deindustrialization, unemployment and growing poverty that has only worsened since the financial crash of 2008, is and remains a microcosm of much of the US.

SEP supporters, with Carl himself playing a very active role, gathered more than 3,200 signatures to earn a place on the ballot in 2004, traveling to different parts of the district, the largest in area in the eastern half of the US. Carl's campaign highlighted opposition to the war in Iraq. He won support from workers, including families of US soldiers, who were outraged by the war and in particular by the notorious torture that had been exposed earlier that year at the Abu Ghraib prison.

Cooley addressed audiences in Bangor and the University of Maine. He twice debated the Democratic incumbent, Michael Michaud, and the Republican, Brian Hamel. Everywhere the SEP candidate won support for his opposition to the war and to the unending attacks on jobs and living standards, for which both capitalist parties were responsible.

Addressing a public meeting in Bangor, Cooley explained, "What I would like to show today is that the movement to the right of American foreign policy is not the result of the particular evil of its leaders, but is rather part of the trajectory of capitalism itself." He explained that the eruption of US militarism was the product of American capitalism's decline in relation to its international rivals.

"Two points are foremost," the candidate said. "The working class must have a party that is completely independent of the capitalist-controlled Democrats and Republicans; and this organization must have as its goal the democratically controlled reorganization of the world economy to satisfy the needs and wants of the international working class, not the profits of the elite."

Carl won nearly 10,000 votes in 2004, or about 2.5 percent of the total. It was an impressive figure for the first-ever socialist campaign in the easternmost US state. As Cooley told the WSWS, he found that workers were "curious and were not frightened by the word socialist. They were looking for real answers to the problems they confront: war, the destruction of jobs, the lack of a future for the youth." Carl's experiences were to be confirmed in the next period, as the working class has moved to the left and expressed growing support for socialism, even as the two-party political system has moved sharply to the right, as reflected in

the election of Trump and the filthy role of the Democrats in making possible his victory, long since having abandoned any pretense to speak for the working class.

Continuing his political work after 2004, on a number of occasions Carl drove down to Boston and New York City to attend public meetings of the SEP. He also attended several national meetings and SEP schools, even when he was into his 80s.

Carl's last years were difficult, however, as his illness prevented his participation in the political struggle alongside his comrades in the SEP.

Carl Cooley was a devoted representative of the US and international working class, an inspiring example of commitment and dedication, and a harbinger of the masses of workers and young people who will be turning to revolutionary socialism as the answer to the mortal threats of war, poverty and dictatorship.



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