

SEP holds campaign rally at FCA Warren Stamping plant

Autoworkers welcome SEP candidate Niles Niemuth

Tim Rivers
15 October 2018

Socialist Equality Party candidate for Congress in Michigan's 12th district, Niles Niemuth, led a lively campaign rally Saturday at the Fiat Chrysler Warren Stamping plant north of Detroit.

Workers at the plant are drawn from all over the Detroit metropolitan area and build parts for Chrysler vehicles, including the Dodge Ram truck.

There were animated discussions with Niles and SEP campaigners on a wide variety of issues, including the still-unexplained death of young Temporary Part Time worker Jacoby Hennings, who died last October at the Ford Woodhaven Stamping Plant after an hour-long meeting with United Auto Workers officials.

SEP campaign team members distributed copies of the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* containing a statement by Niles calling for a full and independent investigation into the death of Hennings, whose tragic end underscores the brutal exploitation of TPT workers, sanctioned by the UAW.

Many workers signed up to receive the *Autoworker Newsletter*. And there was a somber, yet keen, interest in the live internet discussion that will be held next weekend between WSWS International Labor Editor Jerry White and Niles Niemuth on the campaign for a full and open investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Jacoby Hennings. His mother, Shemeeka, works at Warren Stamping.

The Hennings family has denounced the lies that were spread by the UAW and the media that their child was on drugs at the time of his death—a lie that was disproven by the coroner's report, which found only caffeine in his system.

"We were all devastated," said Anita, a close friend. "We still are. And I support Shemeeka 100 percent"

She firmly supported the fight for a full and open investigation, as did many others.

As workers stopped to shake hands with Niles and begin reading campaign literature, he explained the party's socialist program, including the urgent need for workers to break from the two parties of big business, both Democrats and Republicans, and construct new organizations of struggle based on the rank and file in opposition to the corporatist UAW.

Many asked what he meant by the struggle for socialism. Niles explained that under conditions of soaring social inequality and the danger of war and dictatorship the working class must disarm the capitalist class, put an end to war and reorganize the world economy to guarantee well-paid jobs, safe working conditions, education and health care for all.

"Right now the capitalists control everything in society," he said. "We are fighting for socialism, which means that the working class would control the factories and the wealth of society to provide for the needs of the overwhelming mass of the world's population."

A number of workers began to read the newsletter and campaign literature that campaigners were distributing. There was keen interest, for example, in the figures on the explosive growth of social inequality. "In just two years," a campaign statement explains, for example, "the wealth of [the world's] billionaires surged by 24 percent to a record \$9.2 trillion, equal to 12 percent of the economic output of the entire planet."

Delorian, who hired in as a Temporary Part Time worker just five months ago, wanted to know how such soaring levels of personal wealth and income inequality would impact the lives factory workers like herself.

TPT's are typically kept at half pay of \$15.00 per hour for extended periods of time because the United Auto Workers union conspires with the companies to suppress the general level of wages as the principal means of extracting greater profits from the workers.

"I heard the group before us," she said, "had to wait three years before they got rolled over"—which means a promotion to full pay, or into a progression of steps toward full pay. There are now so many different pay grades and job classifications between full-time workers making full pay of \$30.00 an hour and temporary, part-time workers making a fraction of that amount that it is difficult for workers to know where they stand.

There is a direct relationship between the suppression of wages and the spiraling rise in wealth of the ruling elite. She was surprised to learn, for example, that the flood of temporary, low-paid jobs in the factories began with a vengeance nine years ago with the contract terms imposed by the Obama administration during the restructuring of the auto industry in 2009.

Her cousin started working at Amazon five months ago. When SEP campaigners explained that Jeff Bezos, the CEO and the richest man ever, makes more money in one second than a typical Amazon worker in India receives for an entire year, she gasped, "That's crazy!" As she signed up to receive the newsletter by email, she asked us to keep in touch and tell her about upcoming events in the campaign.

One worker said that she had worked as a teacher before being hired at Chrysler. She explained that it became impossible for her to survive on a teacher's salary due to the savage cuts that have been carried out on education by successive Democratic and Republican administrations.

Another worker related how she was forced to commute from Flint, Michigan, about an hour's drive to the north. She was interested in learning more about the SEP position on the Flint water crisis, which saw the lead poisoning of the city's 100,000 residents due to a deliberate decision by city and state officials to use untreated, corrosive water from the Flint River.

On the opposite side of Mound Road lies the non-union factory Flex-N-Gate, which produces parts for the Big Three. Inside, poverty wages and wretched working conditions are the product of decades of betrayals in which the UAW tied the hands of their

members while the auto companies spun off their parts production operations into such facilities, paying poverty-level wages.

Steve, a worker from the Flex-N-Gate plant, was walking to the bus stop near the site of the rally. He stopped to speak to Niles. He explained that the \$10.00 per hour he was getting is still better than the last job he had. It is now more than four decades since a young worker could leave high school to take a job at full pay in an auto plant.

He shook Niles' hand and was eager to learn about the SEP campaign. Socialism was new to him, and he was very interested to find out more.

Niles compared his poverty-level paycheck to the obscene wealth of the financial oligarchy that runs our society. "Outrageous!" was the young worker's response. He agreed that the working class needed to take up the fight against low wages and for better working conditions.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact