

Socialist Equality Party Congressional candidate Niles Niemuth visits Detroit hotel workers' picket line

Our reporter
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Striking hotel workers in Detroit gave Niles Niemuth, Socialist Equality Party candidate for Congress in the Michigan's 12th district, a warm welcome at the picket line Wednesday in front of the Westin Book Cadillac hotel downtown.

The walkout at the Book Cadillac is part of a wider strike against Marriott properties in eight cities involving close to 8,000 workers, members of the UNITE HERE union. It is one manifestation of a growing mood of resistance in the working class after decades in which the unions have suppressed strikes in the United States.

The workers are demanding substantial raises above the poverty level wages most now receive, which are at least \$2 per hour lower than other Marriott workers in the city. To this point, the Book Cadillac workers have been left isolated, with supervisory and non-striking personnel being used as strikebreakers to maintain hotel operations.

A striking worker told Niles about the issues Marriott workers in Detroit are facing. "The first couple of contracts we didn't take any raises. The whole city of Detroit was not doing well because of the economy. Six years of nothing. Now, things are thriving, this hotel is profitable. They're still telling us they are not going to give any raise. I've been here 10 years. I have got about a 70-cent raise in 10 years. It's almost unbelievable. The wages are lower than everyone else. They've got the MGM, the Renaissance Center Hotel.

"In 1986, I got a quarter raise at McDonald's. They want to give me two cents. What can I do with two cents?"

Niles pointed out that politicians from both the Republicans and the Democrats had overseen a huge

transfer of wealth from the working class to the richest layers in society. As an example, he pointed to the recent decision by the City of Detroit and the state of Michigan to hand over huge tax breaks to corporate interests in the city, including a \$100 million tax abatement to Ford Motors for the renovation of the old Michigan Central train station and more than half a billion dollars to billionaire Dan Gilbert for the construction of a new office building downtown.

Another worker, Damico, said, "We were just down at the City County building, we were saying it wasn't right [to hand out tax breaks to Ford]."

He continued, "It's rough. Everything is going up. Utilities—I was just on the phone asking why my utilities are so crazy. They said there must be something wrong in your house. I stay in a two-bedroom house. It is small. There is no way I should be paying \$400 a month for gas and lights.

"Hopefully we can get someone like Niles in office to help us out."

In further discussion with workers, Niles explained the political basis of his campaign. He noted that both parties were supporting the squandering of billions on wars while slashing funds for basic social needs.

"We are in favor of bringing democracy to the economy, so that the companies are democratically controlled by the working class, not a handful of rich people who make all the decisions," Niles explained.

Another striker replied, "I think that is awesome. It relates directly to our struggle. We are the working class fighting for what we want. Hotel workers have a direct impact on their industry when they strike."

Niles warned that UNITE HERE did not represent the genuine interests of workers. They had called out

workers in a piecemeal fashion, preventing a united fight not just by hotel workers, but by workers in steel, auto, teachers, Amazon, as well as workers at United Parcel Service who just voted down a contract, only to see it rammed through by the Teamsters.

“There needs to be a nationally coordinated struggle. Not just city by city or hotel by hotel.

“The unions are sitting on hundreds of millions in assets while workers are struggling on meager strike pay. The unions are working to disunite and divide workers. UPS workers just voted to reject their contract. But the Teamsters said ‘we don’t care, we are declaring the contract ratified.’ The unions have worked to keep wages low and profits high.

“The question is building leadership to unite all these struggles together. There should be a general strike of all workers.”

One worker replied, “I think that’s great, but a lot of people are afraid of that.”

Niles explained, “Workers have been told they can’t fight by the unions and the Democratic Party, but workers do want to fight. When workers went on strike in West Virginia, in defiance of their union, they found massive support.”

The worker asked, “Do you think our strike is effective, or is it just smoke and mirrors by the unions?”

“There are tens of thousands of workers in the area, auto workers, teachers, construction workers, Niles said, “but it is not being organized. There were just seven strikes in 2017, among the lowest on record. But it’s not because, as the politicians claim, things are better than ever.”

The worker replied, “They talk about the high employment rate, but it is not just about employment. Workers are working under grueling conditions. I have heard horror stories about workers at UPS. I like my job here, I work in bartending, but I would not want to work in laundry or housekeeping. I make most of my money on tips. I couldn’t make it if it weren’t for that.”

Niles distributed copies of his 2018 election statement to workers on the picket line. He encouraged workers to attend the upcoming lecture on the 80th Anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International being held October 22 in Arbor and October 23 at Wayne State University in Detroit. The working class,

he noted, needs to be learn from the experiences of the revolutionary struggles of the twentieth century in order to prepare for the battles ahead.



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