

Who are Gary Walkowicz and the Working Class Party?

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Gary Walkowicz is running for US Congress from Michigan's 12th Congressional District in Tuesday's midterm elections as the candidate of the so-called Working Class Party, a ballot name adopted by the organization that publishes the *Spark* newsletter.

Walkowicz is a member of the bargaining committee of United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 600 in Dearborn, Michigan, which covers Ford's Rouge complex. He has run several token campaigns for UAW president. This is the third consecutive election in which he has run for Congress from the 12th District against incumbent Democrat Debbie Dingell.

Walkowicz and the Working Class Party, founded on the initiative of the pseudo-left *Spark* organization, made a breakthrough in the 2016 elections, when he won 9,183 votes, or 2.8 percent of the total vote. No doubt the support for Walkowicz was an expression of workers' deep disaffection with the two-party system and their general movement to the left, which also found expression in the large vote for Bernie Sanders in the Democratic presidential primaries. Social opposition within the working class has only grown in the intervening two years.

The Socialist Equality Party is running Niles Niemuth against Walkowicz and the Working Class Party in the 12th District. Niles is running on a socialist program, whose strategic aim is the end of the capitalist system and the reorganization of society to meet human need, not private profit. This program is based on the principles of internationalism, which means the unification of workers of all countries in a common struggle against the capitalist system.

To achieve these aims, the SEP fights to break workers from capitalist politics, including its "left" variants such as Bernie Sanders and the Democratic Socialists of America, which seek to disorient workers by promoting illusions in capitalist reform. The SEP also calls on workers to break with the corrupt trade unions such as the United Auto Workers and form rank-and-file committees to organize their struggles, and works to assist workers in accomplishing this task.

In fighting for this program, the SEP bases itself on the decades-long history of its international movement, the Fourth International, which was founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938 against the crimes of Stalin and the Soviet bureaucracy. The introduction of this history, encompassing the strategic experiences of the international working class over the last 80 years, to a new generation of socialist-minded workers and youth is a major element of Niles' campaign.

The Working Class Party, by contrast, is an electoral front with no principled foundation for its political activities. Despite its name, its orientation is not towards the working class, but towards the trade union officialdom. It seeks to bolster the flagging illusions among workers that these corrupt organizations can be reformed.

While it formally calls for a break with the Democratic and Republican parties, it does not raise any socialist demands. In fact, the word does not appear anywhere in their election platform.

In the "Elections" section of the WCP's website, they state, "All of the candidates featured in this section want to see the working class build its own party, independent of the two parties that have long served the American capitalist class.

"All these candidates understand that the working class cannot solve its problems through elections, not in a society where the capitalist class controls all the levels of power. Elections were not the end goal of these candidates, only the beginning—a lever to pry an opening through which working people could express their anger and their desire to organize for the benefit of their own class.

"All of them share this perspective: the working class, simply to defend itself, will have to organize itself to fight. To do that, the working class will need all its forces: black and white; immigrant and native born; women and men."

This basic formulation, that the WCP's electoral activity is a lever to get the working class to "fight," is repeated over and over again, without elaboration or amendment, in virtually every speech and public statement by Walkowicz and the WCP's other candidates. "I'm not here to promise that I can get in office and change anything," Walkowicz said in a recent interview on Detroit public radio. "I don't think any politician can change anything. Throughout history, we have not seen that. It has not been legislation, it has not been politicians who have made any basic changes. It has been struggles."

The most striking thing about the Working Class Party's election platform itself is its formlessness. It takes no position on any concrete political question. On the most critical issues of the day, including the drive to war against Russia and China, the crisis of the Trump administration, the bipartisan assault on immigrants, the Democrats' anti-Russian campaign and the growth of internet censorship, the Working Class Party has literally nothing to say.

What then, does the Working Class Party propose that the working class "fight" and "struggle" against? How and against what social forces is the unification of the working class to be

achieved? Their formulation, while appearing superficially militant, has no political substance.

The absence of any reference to socialism in the Working Class Party's platform is highly significant. History has shown time and again that the real political independence of the working class is impossible without a revolutionary socialist program.

To take only an example from recent headlines, consider the fate of the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil, which ran the country under the ex-metalworker president Lula. Its corruption and right-wing policies left the PT so discredited that it paved the way for the election of fascist army officer Jair Bolsonaro, showing that merely *calling* a party a "worker's party" and even having leaders with working-class backgrounds does not guarantee a working class program or orientation.

The decisive criteria for establishing the class orientation of a political tendency is its program. The Working Class Party's program is a classic example of syndicalism, a variety of middle-class radicalism which promotes trade union militancy as a substitute for socialist politics.

Closely related to anarchism, which rejects as a matter of principle any coherent, unified political perspective, syndicalism is incapable of, and in fact hostile to, political consistency. This explains the lack of any concreteness in the Working Class Party's program and its refusal to deal with any issues of deeper political perspective.

While syndicalism has at times had an influence within sections of the working class, especially in the United States, where the influence of socialist ideas was relatively limited historically, socialists have always understood that syndicalism's insistence on "no politics" leaves unchallenged the politics of the ruling class, depriving workers of a clear perspective or understanding of their own interests, and paving the way for defeat.

Moreover, the trade unions have been fundamentally transformed over the past four decades into corrupt agencies of management. This has made syndicalist rhetoric uniquely suited for "oppositionists" within the trade union apparatus whose real aim is to block any genuine struggle by the workers by promoting illusions in the possibility of reforming these corrupt, pro-company organizations.

This is what accounts for Walkowicz's participation in this electoral front. When he ran for union president at the UAW convention in June, Walkowicz warned convention delegates in an open letter: "Many workers have lost faith in the unions. This is the dangerous consequence of the union leadership's policy of partnership with the very people who are attacking us."

Walkowicz's goal, in other words, is to promote workers' "faith" in an organization which, by his own admission, works hand-in-glove with the companies to enforce layoffs and concessions. Such loyal "opposition," which treats the corrupt relationship between the unions and the companies as a simple misunderstanding, has long served a critical role in propping up the authority of these bankrupt organizations. The Teamsters for a Democratic Union, for example, are urging UPS workers not to strike in defiance of the union's attempts to override a "no" vote on the latest sellout contract, urging them instead to write letters to Teamsters President James Hoffa.

For all of his declared opposition to the UAW leadership, Walkowicz played no significant role in mobilizing autoworkers during the rank-and-file rebellion in 2015 against the sellout contract (the SEP and WSWS, by contrast, played the leading role, with thousands of workers signing up for the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* during the contract vote). He has not said anything about the unexplained shooting death of young part-time worker Jacoby Hennings at the UAW office in Ford's Woodhaven Stamping plant.

He has also maintained a studied silence on the widening UAW-Chrysler bribery scandal, because to do so would expose his claim that the union is still a workers' organization that can be reformed.

During the teachers strikes and other workers struggles over the course of the past year, The Socialist Equality Party and *World Socialist Web Site* encountered the argument of "no politics" again and again from "left" apologists for the unions. This was inevitably coupled with attempts to censor material from the *World Socialist Web Site* that exposed the treachery of the trade unions and their collaboration with Democratic Party in shutting down the strikes.

The role of Spark in the Working Class Party deserves attention. Spark is a right-centrist organization that is affiliated with the French Lutte Ouvrière (LO) group, a self-described Trotskyist tendency that declares that the Fourth International which Trotsky founded is a "failure." Its origins lie in an earlier French group which had refused to participate in the founding of the Fourth International.

Spark and its co-thinkers' entire histories are steeped in political pessimism and equivocation. The role of such organizations is to freeze the movement of workers to the left in a "centrist" stage—that is, at that moment when workers move between reformism and revolutionary politics—by buttressing illusions in the old organizations under cover of radical-sounding phrases.

No doubt, some workers who are disgusted with the two big business parties and are searching for a way to articulate their opposition to the entire existing setup may be attracted to the name Working Class Party on the ballot. But, when considering the program and history of the different candidates in Michigan's 12th District, there is only one candidate which truly represents the working class—the Socialist Equality Party's candidate, Niles Niemuth.



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