

“Why the working class needs socialism”

Large turnout to hear SEP candidate Niles Niemuth at University of Michigan

Our reporters
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Niles Niemuth is the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Congress in Michigan's 12th Congressional District. Visit niles2018.com to donate and get involved in the campaign.

The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) hosted a meeting Tuesday night, “Why the working class needs socialism,” with Niles Niemuth, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Congress in Michigan's 12th District. The meeting was well attended, reflecting the growing support for socialism among youth and students.

“We are running a different type of election campaign,” Niles said in his opening remarks. “There is no genuine socialist movement outside of the Socialist Equality Party. This is a movement of, by, and for the working class.”

In contrast to the general media presentation of Trump as an aberration, Niles said of Trump: “He didn't come out of nowhere. He is the stinking byproduct of endless wars abroad, endless police killings, endemic poverty, stagnant and declining wages, deindustrialization and a raging opioid crisis, all of which is underwritten by ever rising levels of social inequality.”

Niles noted that Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon, saw his fortune rise by \$50 billion so far in 2018, which would be enough to pay a bonus of \$100,000 to each of his company's more than half a million workers worldwide.

Describing the Democratic Party, whose opposition to Trump centers on their anti-Russia witch-hunt, Niles said an appropriate response was suggested by Shakespeare: “A plague on both your parties!”

Niles explained that “the latest military budget [an astounding \$716 billion] was endorsed by a large majority of both Democrats and Republicans in Congress, including my Democratic opponent, Debbie Dingell.”

Niles stressed that the most significant change in the political situation is the growing resistance of the working class. He reviewed the strikes by teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona and now the threat to strike in Los Angeles and thousands of teachers walking off their jobs in Washington state. He also noted that nurses in Ann Arbor are in their third month of working without a contract and are casting ballots this week for strike authorization.

“None of the capitalist politicians, be they in the mold of Sanders, Trump, or Debbie Dingell, herself a former auto company lobbyist, speak for the interests of the working class.” The struggles of workers, he added, are coming into ever more direct conflict with the corporatist trade unions.

Niles said that while polls are showing that more than half of young people have a positive view of socialism: “there is 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 spent time explaining that the “socialism” of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is a fraud. “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.”

Niles continued, “Genuine socialism is revolutionary. 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.”

Following Niles’ speech, a discussion ensued for over an hour, in which most in the audience spoke and asked questions.

In response to a question on environmentalism, Niles said that addressing major environmental problems requires global economic planning to control pollutants and carbon emissions which therefore requires an international perspective and socialist revolution.

Several students asked about the SEP’s position on racism, sexism and identity politics. “Under capitalism, the ruling class promotes racism and sexism, and we can’t say we’ll deal with those problems first and then deal with capitalism. We fight for workers and youth to understand we have the same class interests, whether you’re a man or woman, black or white.” He said the SEP was opposed to identity politics, the politics of the Democratic Party, which seeks to divide workers and subordinate them to the capitalist system.

Several students wanted to hear more about the DSA and the differences between the SEP, the DSA and the Democrats.

“The Democrats need the DSA to misdirect people,” Niles said. “We seek to expose them. We are not going to promote illusions in the Democratic Party. After 150 years, the Democrats are not going to turn into a workers’ party. But the Democratic Party understands that the DSA is useful. We will expose the DSA, as we exposed Bernie Sanders every step of the way in 2016.”

Another student wanted to know what would happen if he were elected. Niles explained that “this would throw the ruling class into a major crisis. If hundreds of thousands of residents in the 12th District voted for a genuine socialist candidate, what would that say about the working class across the country and around the world? And who knows if they would even allow me to be seated? If I was there, I would put forward our program and call for the working class to mobilize against the entire system.”

Questions continued on how and why Trump won the 2016 election, how the socialist reorganization of

society could happen; and how to reach workers throughout Michigan.

The WSWS interviewed Kate, a University of Michigan student who met IYSSE campaigners at the college’s “Festifall” event the previous week and decided to attend the meeting.

“I really liked the meeting. It was very informative, and I appreciated the way Niles was so prepared for the questions that were asked. It is clear to me that the fake socialists, like the DSA, are not for socialism. I’ve gone through the whole process with the DSA, which I started about two years ago. I was so disappointed in their pro-establishment politics.

“The DSA is pretty much how Niles explained them, that when it comes to wealth redistribution, they are not for this. The DSA is reformist, but the IYSSE is independent and opposed to imperialist war. This is the key—opposition to war! The lack of opposition to war from the pseudo-left is also the key to understanding them.

“I agree that class inequality is the issue, not identity politics. When it comes to dealing with climate change, war, inequality, racism—there must be a socialist revolution.

“I was dying to find a genuine socialist party because I want to be involved in revolutionary politics. I know that what is required is a real change, a revolutionary one.”



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