

SEP campaigns in Michigan, California and Kentucky

5 March 2012

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party's presidential and vice presidential candidates Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer are campaigning throughout the country to promote a socialist program in the 2012 elections. We publish here reports from Michigan, California, and Kentucky. For more information and to get involved, visit socialequality.com.

Wayne, Michigan

Members of the Socialist Equality Party have been distributing articles at the Ford Michigan Avenue Assembly plant in Wayne, Michigan for several months. When the announcement of Jerry White's campaign for the presidency appeared in a newsletter distributed at the plant on Thursday, February 23, many workers expressed keen interest. The factory assembles the Ford Focus and is currently undergoing substantial retooling to accommodate a new hybrid model called the C-Max.

High seniority workers from Ford parts plants in Saline and Milan, Michigan are being transferred into the Wayne plant. Those parts manufacturing facilities are being spun off into subsidiary companies that will be able to hire workers at the entry level wage of \$14.00 per hour. The strategy adopted by the United Auto Workers in 2008 was to split the work force so that high seniority workers at the higher wage would be isolated in the factories responsible for final assembly. All the sub-assembly plants will be relegated to entry-level wages at half pay. Workers recognize the split as a knife in their back and are generally hostile to the UAW.

At the distribution on March 1, Charles, who had quit the shop committee in disgust at corruption within the union, spoke with members of the campaign team. "I couldn't stand what they wanted me to do to my brothers," he said. "They were always trying to give me little perks to sell out."

Charles said he had been following the WSWs auto workers newsletter since it first appeared. "I am an avid reader," he said. "I know that a revolution will be necessary. People cannot survive." Many of his friends and family members have been hard hit by unemployment in the Detroit area. "I do what I can to help them, but I cannot help everyone who needs it. Something has to change."

Many workers who follow the newsletter expressed similar sentiments. Conditions are fast approaching the breaking point. "This place is going to explode," said Bob. "How much more do we have to sacrifice to keep a job?" Bob is going through bankruptcy and struggling to keep his house. "Everything I have was based on my gross income from 15 years ago. We lost our cost of living. That was \$6,000 a year. I cannot pay for the things I have now."

"I don't like what's going on but there is not much I can do about it," Bob said. "I cannot speak this way in the factory. I would be singled out and victimized by the union." Bob explained that the concessions on work rules which the union gave up in the last contract were undermining job security, especially for older workers. "I hate walking into the plant with no job security." He added, "We used to have security. Now we don't. They gave up our return to basic unit rights without informing the members."

When he looked at the WSWs article on Barack Obama's speech to the UAW, Charles said, "You guys are socialists, right? How do you prevent the corruption like what happened to the UAW?" The discussion then ranged over questions such as the history of the Soviet Union, the world economic crisis, and the history of the UAW itself. A number of workers joined in. Charles said he was not convinced, but was eager to meet Jerry White.

Northern California

On March 1, around 200 protesters from Oakland and Berkeley rallied against cuts to education outside Oakland City Hall, as part of demonstrations throughout the state of California. The protest was called by Occupy Education along with various unions that have endorsed Obama for president, like the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. A number of pseudo-left organizations, such as the International Socialist Organization, also endorsed the event.

After repeated budget cuts imposed by the Democratic Governor Jerry Brown, along with the Obama administration's assault on financial aid, many colleges and students are in dire straits. Due to lower than expected revenues, California's Community College system is facing an extra \$149 million shortfall this year, with the

governor threatening additional cuts if his tax proposal is not passed in November.

The first protesters on the scene were students and teachers from Laney College who spoke about Brown's role in the budget cuts and his regressive tax proposal, the government's push for charter schools, and the connection between the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and the attack on education. They were later joined by UC Berkeley students.

Campaigners with the Socialist Equality Party spoke to protesters about Jerry White's presidential campaign, the need for free education, and the need for an independent movement of the working class against Democrats and Republicans. They distributed copies of a statement by Phyllis Scherrer, the SEP's vice presidential candidate. (See, "Defend public education!")

Joe, who has been involved in the occupy protests, said: "I came out here today in solidarity because I go to all the marches. The entire system is screwed. All these attacks are intertwined; an attack on one is an attack on all. The attack on education is the same as an attack on healthcare. If the rich were paying the same taxes as the rest of us we could solve all these problems."

When asked about the role of the Democrats Joe replied, "Both the major parties are in bed with each other and the corporations. It doesn't really matter who's voted in because it's going to be the bankers calling the shots."

Joshua, a Laney College student, said, "Everybody needs an education so that everyone can go farther in life. They want to cut everything—education, health care, elder care. It all started when Bush came into office and it's still messed up."

San Diego, California

About 200 students and faculty staged a walkout and held a rally on campus in San Diego. The politics expressed at the rally were tame and completely within the orbit of the Democratic Party.

One of the speakers, Prof. Charles Toombs, head of the teachers union at SDSU, urged the students to "raise their voices." "One thing I learned," he said, "when I visited the legislature, is that they really listen and read your letters."

The SEP spoke to students from San Diego City College.

Cyrus is taking political science classes at the college. "I am studying politics because I'm interested in the needs of the people. There are two kinds of politics—one kind for the rich, one kind for the poor. I'm out here because I want to be involved in the second kind."

"There are different struggles going on all over the world, some are more extreme than here. But struggles are emerging here." When asked what the struggles have in common around the world Cyrus

said, "peoples' needs are similar".

"People are now feeling more pressure, they are feeling it, getting it in their bones. We haven't seen much protest in the last 30 to 40 years—since the Civil Rights movement—but things are not like they were 30-40 years ago, they are changing. The rulers today are more greedy than ever. The millionaires want to be billionaires."

Morehead, Kentucky

Supporters of the SEP election campaign spoke with workers in Morehead, Kentucky on Saturday. Campaigners distributed statements by Jerry White, along with materials to promote a March 15 public meeting to be held at Morehead State University, at which SEP vice presidential candidate Phyllis Scherrer is scheduled to speak.

Morehead is a small town in eastern Kentucky, located in the foothills of the Daniel Boone National Forest, with a population of just 6,845 people. More than 32 percent of residents live below the official poverty line. The median household income stands at \$22,142. At the center of town is Morehead State University, ranked among the top 25 public universities in the South, which 7,399 undergraduate students attend.

Saturday's campaign took place just one day after deadly storms swept through the region. On Friday, four tornadoes with winds of up to 160 mph struck Kentucky, leaving at least 22 dead. The small towns of eastern Kentucky were among the hardest hit areas. West Liberty, Kentucky, located just south of Morehead, was virtually destroyed. (See, "West Liberty, Kentucky virtually destroyed by storm")

Campaigners spoke with workers about the social component of this disaster and called for devoting billions of dollars to rebuilding basic infrastructure, including safer homes and more adequate tornado warning systems, to help guard the population against natural disasters like Friday's storms.

Among the workers campaigners spoke with Saturday was Michael, a resident of West Liberty. Michael has lived for the past 15 years at West Liberty's Liberty Heights apartments. He was with his two children when the tornado hit. "It sounded like a train ripping through our home," he said, "I never experienced anything like this, especially this late in the Winter." Michael said he was now "just trying to figure out where to live."



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