

SEP supporters campaign for meetings in Portland and Kentucky

Our reporters
13 March 2012

This Wednesday, March 14, Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White will speak at a public meeting in Portland, Oregon, and vice presidential candidate Phyllis Scherrer will speak in Morehead, Kentucky the next day. The meetings are part of a series organized throughout the country to explain the SEP's program. (See "Socialism and the 2012 elections")

SEP supporters have been promoting the meetings and talking to workers and students in the two regions.

Morehead and Lexington, Kentucky

Morehead State University in eastern Kentucky, located in the foothills of the Daniel Boone National Forest, is attended by 7,399 undergraduate students, many of whom commute to school from small towns all over the region.

The tornado disaster that swept through eastern Kentucky on March 2, devastating small communities like West Liberty, East Bernstadt and Salyersville, was still very much on the minds of students last week. Many students had family or friends who went through the storms.

Campaigners distributed copies of "The tornado disaster and the case for socialist planning," a statement by Scherrer, and spoke with students about the social component of the disaster. The SEP calls for redirecting billions to rebuilding basic infrastructure, including safer homes, public storm shelters and severe weather warning systems.

The tornadoes left 23 dead in Kentucky and destroyed

entire towns. The storms struck one of the most economically depressed regions in the country, in which unsafe housing and decaying infrastructure left thousands completely defenseless in the face of the disaster.

No less than 16 of the 23 Kentuckians killed in the storms lived in mobile homes unable to offer any protection. No tornado sirens provided them with warning, and there were no public storm shelters in which they could take refuge. Many fled their trailer homes to take shelter in their vehicles, if they had them, or in ditches. Survivors are now left with the prospect of rebuilding their lives from scratch, with their homes and jobs destroyed.

The SEP campaign drew considerable support. Many students left their information at the campaign table set up at the center of campus, asking to learn more about the Socialist Equality Party. Campaigners collected donations for the SEP election fund and sold copies of "The Breakdown of Capitalism and the Fight for Socialism in the United States," the program of the SEP.

Ashley Dehart, 20, said of the storms, "I was literally in shock. I didn't know there could be a tornado in hilly terrain. I thought we were safe. We definitely need better sirens and infrastructure. We need to better understand how tornadoes work."

After some discussion on Scherrer's statement, Ashley said, "I agree with the position. It seems like your party is for the welfare of everyone."

On Saturday, campaigners spoke to workers at a grocery store on Lexington's north side, students at the University of Kentucky in downtown Lexington, and a gathering of "Occupy Lexington" protesters at the Chase Bank building on Main Street.

The Occupy Lexington camp had been one of the

longest running of the Occupy protests before police dismantled the camp early this year. Protester Steven Burt told campaigners, “In early January, police came and took our stuff. As our group started to grow, police started complaining about our camp. We complied with everything they asked, but it didn’t satisfy them. We hope to start a new campsite. We’re going to be discussing it today. “

Asked what he thought of President Obama’s signing of the National Defense Authorization Act, Burt said, “It’s a step toward the formation of a police state. It’s a betrayal to many liberals, to know that their voice can’t even be heard.”

“Obama’s in the pocket of Wall Street,” Burt added, “The two-party system has failed.”

SEP campaigners explained that the Obama administration had never represented the interests of working people and was now leading the charge in the assault on democratic rights. These assaults, including the dismantling of the Occupy Lexington camp, were the ruling elite’s response to emerging social struggles.

April, another protester, told SEP supporters that “appealing to the Democrats or Republicans was a waste of time. They both serve the top and give us the illusion of choice. I think people are really waking up. Sometimes it takes cuts in social spending and a general disregard for the needs of ordinary people in order for that to happen.”

April added, “I think the only progress that has been made in history has been made by people who are willing to risk life and limb to make it happen.”

Portland, Oregon

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Students for Social Equality set up a table at the student center of Portland Community College, Sylvania Campus last week.

The campus, located in Southwest Portland, is the largest of the community college system. With substantial numbers of unemployed or underemployed workers looking to upgrade their skills due to the recession, PCC saw an 18.1 percent growth in student enrollment in 2010 and 7.5 percent for the last winter term.

In the course of the two days spent on campus, supporters of the SEP and ISSE passed out several hundred leaflets for a public meeting that will be addressed by White, to be held at Portland State University.

That there was broad support for this campaign was evidenced in comments by the students as well as many signing to have an ISSE chapter officially recognized by the school. Four new members were recruited by the ISSE.

We spoke with several students about the conditions facing young people.

Nicole Rist said, “Wealth isn’t distributed equally enough. My husband only made \$18,000 last year. I thought that there was a lot of potential with Obama and truthfully, I voted for him.

“I have not been to the doctors since my child was six weeks old, and he is now ten years old. By the time I am done with school my student loans will be large enough to buy a house with. And now I have just got an electric bill for \$500.

Shastina said, “I can say a lot of the educational system is faulty. No one has equal opportunity even though we push for that in our society. Kids in low socioeconomic schools are being trained to work in low socioeconomic jobs. If they are poor their expectations for them are lower, they are set up for failure. Everyone is overqualified for the jobs that are not there. They set us up to fail. It’s like a pyramid with the rich on top and all the workers on the bottom. People need more awareness.

Mel said, “There are so many things bothering me. Right now how the politicians have been campaigning over a year like it is a popularity contest. I feel very strongly that education needs to be improved. For young people it is a very difficult time in moving from high school to college to the work force.”

On Obama’s threats against Iran she said, “I don’t think we have any reason to be in Iran. Every time we go to war we have more people hating us.”



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