

SEP vice presidential candidate speaks in Ithaca, New York

A WSWS reporting team
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Phyllis Scherrer, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for vice president, spoke to two classes of students at Ithaca College on Monday. She also gave an interview to a local radio station as part of a campaign in upstate New York that includes a public meeting in Syracuse and two more in Ithaca.

In her remarks to the political science classes, Scherrer reviewed her own political background and why she was won to a socialist perspective. She stressed that students today are surrounded by the most shallow political sloganeering from both big business parties, the Democrats and Republicans.

Scherrer reviewed the basic issues raised by the SEP campaign—the fight against inequality, war, and the attack on democratic rights—and explained the need for a socialist solution. She encouraged students to study politics with the seriousness deserved by a subject that will determine the fate of everyone on the planet.

Presentations at both classes were followed by many questions, and discussion that continued well after the classes ended. Scherrer is a school teacher in the Pittsburgh area, and many questions revolved around public education.

One student asked how to address the crisis in education, with students saddled by larger and larger debts after graduation. Scherrer responded by noting that student debt was now estimated at more than \$1 trillion, surpassing credit card debt. She explained the SEP's position on the abolition of student debt,

insisting that this was only possible through the nationalization of the banks, which enforce a virtual indentured servitude on millions of young people.

Another student asked how to lower college tuition. Scherrer pointed out that, with the support of both big business parties, trillions of dollars had been deployed overnight to bail out the banks, but there was no constituency in the political establishment to lower college tuition or student debt. The money is clearly there, she said—it is simply not being used to benefit the vast majority of mankind. Scherrer emphasized that education, including higher education, should be available to all, at no cost, as a basic social right.

A student studying to be a teacher asked about the role of standardized testing in education. Scherrer explained that the increasingly obsessive focus on testing was bound up with the attack on public education as a whole. Given the resources, teachers and educators can bring a varied and diverse range of educational resources to students based on their need. “To educators, humans are more than stock portfolios,” Scherrer said. “They are not easily quantified.”

Scherrer went on to argue that education is only part of an entire network of social needs. “Can students learn if they are hungry?” she asked. “The capitalist system offers no solutions to these larger social and human issues.”

One student raised the question of tenure in public schools, and asked whether it was a problem. Scherrer reviewed the background of the fight to establish protections against the arbitrary firing of teachers. Witch-hunts were conducted in the 1930s and 1950s against teachers advocating reforms. Eliminating job security today is bound up with an effort to more completely subordinate teachers to the dictates of

administrators.

Scherrer noted that teachers have committed suicide in Chicago and Los Angeles from extreme frustration at the impossibility of their job situations. The solution is not to further weaken their rights, but to defend them. “Teachers want to teach,” Scherrer said. “We need to make it possible for them to teach.”

Several students asked basic questions about the theory and history of socialism. One observed that the Soviet Union is associated with tyranny. Scherrer explained that the Socialist Equality Party is rooted in the traditions of Trotskyism and opposition to Stalinism. The great traditions of October 1917 Revolution are willfully distorted by its opponents. It is necessary, Scherrer said, to study these historical experiences carefully. “We can give that task to no one else. If we are to apply the lessons of 1917 to today, students must fight for the highest level of political discourse.”

After the second class was over, students continued the discussion with Scherrer in the hallway. One student asked about internationalism and how it was possible to unite workers all around the world. Scherrer explained that workers are united through the social process of production. They are the only truly international class capable of coordinating the complexities of global production democratically, and according to a rational plan. International coordination is made impossible by private ownership of the means of production and the division of the world into rival nation-states.

Scherrer warned that the conflict between global economy and the nation-state system, which produced two world wars in the 20th Century, was once again leading mankind into a catastrophe. “If we look at the map of Eurasia, we see Iraq, Libya, Turkey, Syria, Iran the strait of Hormuz and the Caspian Sea. A little further East is China and to her north is Russia. The American ruling class doesn’t need the oil in those regions for the United States. However, its control of that region is crucial to use as a battering ram against its rivals.”

“So it’s over power?” one student asked. Scherrer responded, “Yes, it’s over power. The United States is compensating militarily for its economic decline.”

As he walked by the group, one student expressed outrage over the \$1 trillion student debt. He insisted

that it was going to produce the next major financial collapse, leading to a greater downward spiral. Graduates have nothing but minimum wage jobs and tens of thousands of dollars in debt. “It seems like we have a future of indentured servitude,” he said. “What is going to happen us?”

The classroom meetings were followed Tuesday by a public meeting in Syracuse, New York and an interview with the local public radio station. On Wednesday, Scherrer will be giving two more public meetings in Ithaca—one at Cornell University and another at the public library. (See the list of SEP campaign meetings for more information.)



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