

SEP campaign takes socialist program to Syracuse, New York

Our reporters
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Members of the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaigned Saturday in Syracuse, a city in upstate New York, for the election of Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer.

Like so many cities in upstate New York and the American Midwest, Syracuse has suffered from the decline of industry. Historically, it was a center of salt production. It is named after Syracuse, Sicily partly for this reason. The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 allowed for economic further development, facilitating transportation throughout the Midwest and upstate New York region. Syracuse later became the home to numerous manufacturing plants, including auto and parts suppliers.

However, most of the jobs that paid relatively higher wages and benefits have been wiped out over the past several decades.

The Carrier Corporation, a company that makes air conditioners, recently closed its manufacturing operations and is shutting down 1.2 million square feet of buildings that housed them. According to the *Syracuse Post-Standard*, this plant employed 7,100 people at its height. Now the land has been relegated to use as a green space for the city.

Magna International, an auto parts manufacturer, is in the final stages of closing down a massive transmissions factory that employed around 10,000 workers at its height. This occurred after workers rejected a third round of concessions. The shutdown of the plant was aided and abetted by the United Auto Workers. The rejected contract included a clause to reduce wages from \$20 an hour to \$13 or \$16 an hour.

Closing down manufacturing in the area has resulted in a shift to much lower paying jobs. Eric Crane, a school bus driver, told the *World Socialist Web Site*,

“There are plenty of jobs in Syracuse, just none that pay a decent wage.” John, a retired construction worker, agreed. He said, “Prices keep going up for gas and food, but wages and income are going down.”

Eric explained that his wife is a truck driver and is on the road for long periods of time. “Even people who are making a decent wage, that's not enough when you have children to support. The price of fuel has gone up four or five times in the past ten years, and that causes everything to cost more. A lot of the jobs around here don't treat you well and don't pay you well. When you do find a decent job, you have to hold onto it. They are few and far between.”

Eric went on to discuss the state of American politics. “The politicians don't care. They are all rich, and they don't know what the working class is going through. They don't realize what three-fourths of the population is going through.”

John said he supported the SEP's campaign. “I'm working class, and we need an organization that fights for the working class. There hasn't been a good Democratic president since FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt]. They're all for the rich.”

SEP supporters explained that the Democratic Party was always a party of the ruling class, and that the reforms associated with FDR were only wrested through bitter social struggle. The decline of the American ruling class and the rise of a financial aristocracy meant even such reforms were no longer possible. “That's right,” said John. “All they want to do is take from the working man and give to the rich.”

“People are underpaid, and there are no benefits,” John continued. “People are not being paid enough to earn a decent living. Carrier was here for nearly 100 years, and they have left. When you compare the cost of living on one side, and wages on the other, the cost

of living keeps going up but wages are not.”

John was also concerned about the future for young people. He explained that he had worked 30 years in construction “but young people don't get the opportunity to get a job where they can make a decent living and have benefits and retire from.”

Poverty levels in Syracuse are rising. A recent Census Bureau report found that 34 percent of the city has an income below \$23,050 for a family of four (the federal poverty line), up from 27 percent a decade ago.

Syracuse's rate is similar to that of other nearby cities in upstate New York, with Rochester's poverty rate at 33.8 percent and Buffalo at 30.2 percent. This is in contrast to other cities in the Northeast like New York City and Pittsburgh which have poverty rates of 20 percent and 22 percent respectively. Moreover, many neighborhoods in Syracuse are mired in at least 40 percent poverty.

A nurse, who didn't give her name, said, “It's horrible the way people are living now around here. I have to have two jobs just to make ends meet.”

Keysha, a young mother, was concerned with cuts in the local school district budget and programs. “They've cut off a lot of funding. After school programs were once Monday through Friday, and now its only Monday through Thursday. That makes it hard for me, because I have to either work less or pay for daycare.”

The city schools face a \$47 million drop in in state funding. The district in Syracuse has roughly 19,500 students and nearly 1,700 teachers.

“It's hard to find work, very hard, and when you do it's close to minimum wage and that's not enough to take care of things.” Keysha added, “In order to get a future and good education for your children, you have to get more than one job.”

Al Edwards, a retired worker who worked as a postal worker, machinist and custodian, commented on the changing nature of American politics over fifty years. “Now, all the politicians do is throw out promises that the public wants to hear. It happens in the Senate and the House. The first year is for the public, the next year is for themselves to get rich.”

As a Navy veteran, he also added, “I think they should turn over that sergeant in Afghanistan, the one that just killed 16 people, to the government there. He should be tried in Afghanistan, not in the US.” He also commented on the threats against Iran. “I think that the

Iranians should run their own country.”

When asked about the unemployment situation, Al added, “Syracuse has changed. There are no jobs anymore.”

For more information on the SEP campaign and to get involved, visit socialequality.com.



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