

SEP vice presidential candidate wins support in Pittsburgh

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Socialist Equality Party vice presidential candidate Phyllis Scherrer and her supporters won strong support from workers and young people as they campaigned in the North Side neighborhood of Pittsburgh this past week.

Scherrer, a life-long resident of Pittsburgh, campaigned only blocks away from Oliver High School, which is set to be closed next month as part of a series of cutbacks in the public schools. A total of seven schools are targeted for closure and 400 teachers are to be laid off.

Last month, Port Authority officials approved the cutting of 45 of the 102 bus routes in the city, effective in September. The cuts mean many neighborhood residents without cars will lose any means to get downtown and to other areas of the city to work, attend school, shop or visit family and friends.

In the course of speaking to area residents, Scherrer denounced the cutbacks and explained that the SEP rejected the claims by Obama and Romney that there was no money to meet social needs. She pointed to the trillions both parties squandered on the bailout of the banks and criminal wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. She explained that the SEP was fighting for a socialist alternative to the capitalist profit system, which both big business parties served, and the redistribution of society's wealth.

During the campaign Scherrer met and spoke with Carla Holtz and Mia Guidry, both veterans of the army, about their experiences and the conditions they face. Carla explained, "I have been out of work almost two

years. I had a part-time job during the holidays, so luckily I am still collecting a little unemployment. Because of my experience in the military and because of what I did, most jobs say I am over-qualified for the positions. What does that mean? Let me have the job I am qualified for.

"When I retired, I had 23 years in the military, including five years active duty. I worked for Allegheny General Hospital for 15 years, including in the dialysis unit where I was when they laid me off. They said everyone had to be certified for the department and I wasn't.

"They told us we could apply to other departments, but it was the same time West Penn Hospital was closing, so you also had all these people trying to get jobs at the same time and I wasn't able to get one. During unemployment I took my EMT training and now I'm working on becoming a paramedic."

Carla described her experience in the military. "I joined before Desert Storm. Luckily, I didn't have to go to Iraq. President Bush invaded Iraq in 2003 because he was after Saddam Hussein and wanted power.

"We were just pawns in his plans. Too many people have been killed and maimed, both physically and mentally, by that war. If you were a soldier in a combat zone, no matter what, you suffered some type of traumatic stress. I have been trying to help people cope, but it is real hard making that adjustment."

Scherrer explained that the Bush administration used the so-called "war on terror" as a justification for the re-colonialization of large parts of the world, and that this hasn't changed with the election of Obama. "Obama has continued and expanded Bush's war policies," Scherrer said. "Both Republican and Democrat are seeking to offset American's economic decline by

using its military might.”

Mia Guidry, who was in Iraq and is now a systems analyst, said, “Even when you are working on base you are scared. You never know when a mortar is going to land and kill you. That is an unbelievable amount of stress, you don’t get used to it. Everyday there would be a few attacks on our base. It got to the point that you didn’t want to go outside the barracks. You never knew when you could get killed.

“A few of my friends were killed. Every time we went out, we didn’t know if we would be coming back. People have come back mentally damaged. People don’t want to get treatment. They think they can handle it. But they need to have a paper trail, otherwise when they do go to get help, they government will say, ‘well, there is nothing wrong with you.’

“The politicians don’t care about the people, they just care about their friends. There needs to be real jobs for people, jobs that people can make a living with. What is the point of closing schools and not giving kids a decent job—then you spend the money putting them in prisons?”

Many people were upset and angered by the closure of Oliver High School, the cuts in public transit and the lack of jobs. Richard Brown, a retired worker, explained, “I have lived on the North Side all my life, I can’t believe they are closing all these schools. It is going to cause a lot of problems. Young people need to have a decent education if you expect them to get anywhere.

“They are cutting education, but they could give all this money to the banks. You need money for education, not the rich. Obama is just like all the politicians. He doesn’t care about the working people and what they are going through.”



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