

# SEP campaign team visits striking Caterpillar workers in Joliet

Our reporters  
31 July 2012

The presidential and vice presidential candidates of the Socialist Equality Party, Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer, visited striking Caterpillar workers on the picket line in Joliet, Illinois on Monday afternoon. More than 700 workers have been on strike for over three months, courageously opposing the industrial manufacturing giant's plans to cut wages in half and dramatically increase the cost of health care.

Both White and Scherrer expressed, on behalf of the SEP, their solidarity with the striking workers and emphasized the international character of the assault being waged on their living conditions and wages. They also explained the critical need to break with the trade union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party, and to build independent rank-and-file committees dedicated to unifying workers everywhere in a struggle for socialism.

The campaign team also brought messages of support from Caterpillar workers at the Bucyrus mining equipment plant in South Milwaukee, owned by Caterpillar, which Scherrer and other SEP members had recently visited. Both candidates were warmly received on the picket line. They distributed newsletters with reports from Milwaukee as well as analysis of the ongoing Joliet strike.

The Joliet workers and the SEP campaign team discussed the political and class issues behind the assault on the machinists in Joliet. Workers expressed disgust with both the Democratic and Republican Parties in the United States, and were receptive to the SEP's call to break with both big business parties.

experience at the plant, said, "I'm not voting for either of those two [Obama and Romney]. Neither of them have my agenda." What's their agenda?" White inquired. "The rich!"

White later explained, "You're not just fighting one company—behind this company are the courts, the politicians, the union bureaucracy, and ultimately Obama and the whole Democratic Party, the whole government in fact." Robinson cut him off to implore, "I know, all you have to do is look at the mayor of Chicago," referring to the austerity policies of current Democratic Party mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel, Obama's former chief of staff.

Another worker of 16 years, a second generation machinist at the plant, made similar comments later in the day. "Both parties are corrupt, bought and paid for by some of the people who own this plant ... And with the recent Supreme Court case [*Citizens United vs FEC*], the rich can spend as much money as they want keeping these guys in their pocket."

Frank, a worker with 16 years at the plant, said, "The corporations own both political parties. Sometimes the Democrats throw us some crumbs, while the Republicans don't give us anything. But they're the same—the whole government is run by the corporations.

"All of these wars have been fought on behalf of corporate America, from World War I to now. Obama promised to get us out of the wars—and he didn't. I'm not very happy with him. I've lived through seven presidents and they all lie.

Robert Lee Morgan, a worker with 45 years

"It's very hard to run against the Democrats and

Republicans. But back in the 1880s, the farmers started their own party to fight the railroads.”

White explained that the Populist movement had been diverted into the Democratic Party and crushed. Today, the SEP candidate said, the working class has to build its own party to fight to establish a workers’ government. “The wealth created by the working class,” White said, “has to be controlled by the working class. Vast industries have to be taken out of the hands of the corporate CEOs and financial speculators and put under the control of the working class.”

Frank explained how things had changed in Joliet since his family moved there in the 1960s. “We were originally from Arizona, near the Mexican border. My dad moved up here when the copper mines went down. He got a job at Caterpillar before the long 1968 strike. Illinois and other Midwestern states used to be the center of manufacturing. Joliet was known at the City of Steel. The US Steel plant employed 3,000 to 4,000 workers. CAT had 7,000 workers in the early 1960s. All that changed in the 1980s. Thousands lost their jobs.”

Another issue discussed at length was the role of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) in isolating the Joliet machinists from their counterparts throughout the country and internationally, as well as its connection to both major political parties in the US.

Most workers expressed a lack of confidence and frustration in the union. Scherrer pointed to the exorbitant salaries of top union officials. “Workers are getting \$150 per week in strike pay, and IAM union president R. Thomas Buffenbarger is getting \$245,000 per year. The pittance that strikers get of \$150 per week is about what this union official gets per hour.” Workers expressed disgust at these and other exposures of the wealth of management and the union officials.

Morgan, when asked what he thought was going to happen in the coming days, said, “Nothing ... 73 of our guys have already crossed the picket line.”

When White and Scherrer compared what was happening at Caterpillar to similar attacks on auto

workers, he replied, “I know, the same contract they’re trying to give us, they already gave to the auto workers. And their fathers fought against this stuff, and now they’re accepting it.”

In response Scherrer said, “Currently the unions are dividing us. The steelworkers in South Milwaukee are not being told to unite with workers here. Management has a global strategy to divide and impoverish and exploit workers, and the working class needs its own strategy as well. But the key is that the unions carry out the strategy of management. Workers need to break from them and start rank-and-file committees.”

*For more information on the SEP campaign and to get involved, visit [socialequality.com](http://socialequality.com)*



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