

SEP campaigners in Detroit discuss attacks on jobs, public education

Our reporters
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Supporters of Socialist Equality Party candidates Jerry White for President and Phyllis Scherrer for vice president campaigned Saturday at Eastern Market in Detroit.

They distributed copies of the statement by Scherrer titled, “Workers should defend teacher tenure” opposing the attacks on public education being spearheaded by the Obama administration with the support of the Republicans. It called for the defense of teacher tenure, which is under attack in school districts across the United States under the guise of “teacher accountability.”

The state government and municipalities in Michigan are carrying out far-ranging attacks on public education. The Republican controlled state legislature recently passed legislation that strips retirement health care benefits from newly hired teachers while setting in motion plans to eliminate them all together. It also mandated higher health care costs and reduced pension for nearly all of the 450,000 current and retired teachers in Michigan.

Meanwhile, in the city of Detroit a series of emergency managers have gutted the public school system, imposing huge pay cuts on teachers while closing scores of schools to make way for the spread of for profit charters.

SEP campaigners spoke to workers and young people at Eastern Market about the implications of the attack being carried out on public education as well as the broader issues raised by the presidential elections.

Alissa Palmateer teaches in the public schools in North Branch Michigan. She stopped when SEP campaigners explained that the campaign of White and Scherrer opposed the scapegoating of public school teachers. “Our benefits are under attack,” she said. “In fact, they are trying to break public schools altogether and make all schools charter schools.”

Alissa’s mother, Ann Bower, is also a teacher in the North Branch schools. She agreed that public education was being threatened. “It is terrible, they are just raping

us of all of our school needs and what’s good for children. We are paying now for part of our medical plan. They are trying to take away our paraprofessionals that we need to help teach our children.

“My concern is what is good for the children. No Child Left Behind is a farce. There is hurt and frustration among teachers.”

SEP campaigners explained that the attack on public education initiated by the

Bush administration under the No Child Left Behind program was being continued and deepened by the Obama administration’s Race To the Top program, which was promoting for profit charter schools and attacks teacher tenure, with the goal of driving out older better paid teachers and bringing in young teachers who can be exploited for low wages and benefits.

Patrick McGlew, a student at Wayne State University said, “I want to have more faith in Obama, but it comes down to a Coke or Pepsi choice—the lesser of two evils.

SEP supporters explained that both Obama and Romney defended the same interests of the wealthy corporate elite that created the financial catastrophe in 2008. They pointed out that the campaign of Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer called for a break with the two corporate controlled parties and advanced a program based on meeting the needs of working people to jobs, health care, and quality education. They explained that this would require a frontal assault on entrenched corporate wealth.

Patrick expressed interest in the idea of a challenge to the profit system. “There is a media campaign to turn socialism into being just as bad as fascism, but the goal of the corporations is not to benefit all the people.

“I am out of work now and going to school,” he said. Referring to the social rights of the working class contained in the program of the Socialist Equality Party,

Patrick said, “One thing I want to be on that list is the right to privacy. Another thing is the use of drones,” he said referring to the Obama administration’s policy of targeted assassinations. “That really bothers me.”

John Colchagoff, an unemployed worker from Toledo, Ohio stopped to speak to SEP campaigners. He said that he had voted for Obama in 2008, but now felt undecided. “It is kind of a crapshoot. One of the reasons I voted for Obama was that he was a better speaker. I also felt that the Democrats leaned more toward the working man.”

Supporters of White and Scherrer explained that while the Democrats had long claimed to be the party of the common man, the party was behold to the same corporate interests that back the Republicans. They pointed out that both parties were calling for slashing Medicare and other social programs, claiming there was no money, while supporting the bailout of Wall Street in which trillions were handed to the same corporate criminals responsible for the economic crisis.

John agreed with the need for an alternative to the two big business parties. “We need at least five political parties to break up the political monopoly the Republicans and Democrats have,” he said. He added, “But before that happens we are going to see a revolution.”

He explained the personal frustration and anger he felt toward the political establishment that flowed from his own situation. “I am unemployed,” he said. I have two associates degrees. I thought if I didn’t make it in the auto industry, I would make it in the support industries associated with auto.” John added that he would look closely at the SEP campaign material and study what White and Scherrer had to say.



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