

SEP vice presidential candidate speaks to temp workers in McKeesport, Pennsylvania

Samuel Davidson
18 August 2012

The SEP campaign of Jerry White for President and Phyllis Scherrer for Vice President won support from young workers and unemployed in southwestern Pennsylvania this week.

Phyllis Scherrer, along with a team of SEP supporters, campaigned in the former steel town of McKeesport, about 10 miles south of Pittsburgh, along the Monongahela River. McKeesport, once a thriving industrial steel manufacturing city of 30,000 people, is now one of the most impoverished areas of the state.

Scherrer spoke with young workers who had just picked up their check from a day-labor shop, where workers show up as early as 4:30 a.m. with the hope of getting industrial work for the day at \$7.75 an hour.

“I think all the money is going to the rich, while there is nothing going to the poor,” said 27-year-old Russell Milslagle. “I work six days a week for 10, and sometimes 12 hours a day, and I make just \$7.75 an hour.

“I am a felon, I don’t mind telling anyone. When I was 19, I made a mistake and sold a small amount of marijuana to a co-worker. I can’t vote and nobody wants to hire you. I work real hard and I can’t get help with food stamps or cash assistance.”

The state government just ended the cash assistance program in Pennsylvania throwing 70,000 people off the program that provided only \$205.00 a month. “My fiancée was just cut off of benefits,” Russell went on. “She is disabled and can’t work. She has doctor’s notes that she can’t work, but she can’t get Social Security. Now we are fighting with Social Security so she can get benefits.”

Russell initially said he disagreed with the government helping immigrants. “I’m not a bigot, but I think it is wrong for the government to be helping people move here when there are people here who need the jobs.”

Scherrer explained that the working class is international and that the government wants to pit workers of one country against each other, as racism has been used in an effort to keep workers divided in the United States. Scherrer pointed out that the Obama administration has handed trillions of the public’s money to the banks while doing nothing to provide jobs for the unemployed and young workers, whether they are born in the US or anywhere else.

Russell agreed with that, pointing out that while the banks were getting these bailouts, their CEOs were taking expensive vacations at the people’s expense. “Look at the crimes they committed, but none of them are going to jail.”

“They should be taxing these companies so that things can be fair.” Russell pointed out that a company called Eco-Star had a large call center in McKeesport, “They got a ten-year tax break and as soon as it was over they shut down and moved out putting all those people out of work.

“Now the schools are closing because they never got any tax money from them. The cost of living keeps going up and up, and people don’t have the money. Now they are cutting the buses and 90 percent of the poor need the buses to get around.”

Scherrer also spoke with Carl Russell, who told the WSWS, “If I had been given the presidency and been asked to jump start the economy, I would have given the money to the poor so that they could buy the things they needed, not the rich. We work long hours at the plant. I’m a concrete worker and we need more jobs and opportunities.”

Ramone Block is from Louisiana and has done underwater welding on oilrigs in the Gulf of Mexico. He began by saying, “I believe that we should drill as much as possible. We know the risks when we work on those rigs, but we earn a lot of money. I know many people think we shouldn’t drill, but the fault lies with Transocean [for the BP oil disaster of 2011]. They didn’t want to replace the faulty gasket. They didn’t want to stop production, and stop making money, and people died and the Gulf is messed up now.”

Scherrer asked whether production for profit rather than human need was rational if it led to these types of deaths and environmental disasters. She added, “We believe that these industries should be put under the control of the working class. Those who know and understand the production process can make decisions that place human life and the health of the planet above making money.”

Ramone agreed, “As welders and rig workers, we know the right things to do, but we don’t make those decisions. The company does. The current system is irrational. I’ll read your election statement.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact