

Vice presidential candidate Phyllis Scherrer speaks in San Diego

Our reporters
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About 30 students and faculty attended at a talk by Socialist Equality Party vice presidential candidate Phyllis Scherrer at San Diego State University in California on Tuesday. The talk was part of a series of campaign events on the West Coast.

Scherrer covered a wide-range of topics and reviewed in detail the significance and political lessons of the Chicago teachers strike, where she intervened along with other members of the SEP. She drew out the connection between the attack on teachers and public education in Chicago and the bipartisan assault on the working class, led by the Obama administration.

The ruling class in the United States, Scherrer said, is systematically undermining every right of the working class, putting in place a “new normal”—where youth and workers are to receive poverty wages without benefits or safe working conditions. Scherrer described the surprise she sometimes felt when talking to youth, whose conditions of life have so vastly deteriorated.

“There was a student who got up at one of my meetings and told me he did well by making \$10 per hour,” Scherrer said. “I broke it down for him that this amounted to barely \$20,000 per year if he was employed full time—and that’s before taxes. That puts you below the poverty line—you can’t buy a house or raise children on that income.”

Scherrer also explained the international scope of the SEP campaign, reviewing the conflict in Syria and the massacre of miners in South Africa. A video of SEP presidential candidate Jerry White’s campaign visit to Sri Lanka was shown to the audience. Scherrer explained that White’s visit was not a diversion, but an expression of the most essential aim of the campaign: the unification of the working class internationally. The

situation facing working people all over the world is fundamentally the same, she said.

“In one of Obama’s recent speeches he promoted his policy of ‘insourcing,’” Scherrer said. “This is a term applied to making American labor cheaper on the international markets so manufacturing companies are lured back into the country at a higher rate of profit than in Asia or Europe. This happened first with the automakers, but Obama wants to apply the same principle to *all* jobs in the United States.”

The purpose of the SEP election campaign, Scherrer said, was to fight for an independent leadership of the working class, based on a socialist program. No section of the political establishment, Democrat or Republican, has anything to offer the American people but social reaction, war and the attack on democratic rights.

A question and answer followed the talk. Renee, a student at SDSU, noted that in the 1930s there were a lot of strikes in the United States and asked about the SEP’s role in the organization of strikes.

Scherrer reviewed how the gains won by the working class in the 1930s through the unions were bound up with militant struggles, but were also connected to the strength of American capitalism in that period. Under conditions of economic decline, the ruling class was seeking to claw back everything that had been won. The unions, wedded to a nationalist perspective and a defense of capitalism, had been transformed into organizations whose principal role is to enforce the attack on working people.

Scherrer insisted that any struggle for the basic defense of workers interests today would require a break with the unions, through the establishment of independent organization of working class struggle. This must be connected to a political offensive against the capitalist system and the two big business

parties.

A student named Scott commented on the fact that politicians are essentially bought and paid for, representing special interests and corporations rather than the people. He noted that the situation for workers is increasingly intolerable in that the ruling elite is “tightening the noose around the neck of the laboring class.”

A faculty member asked Scherrer to clarify the SEP’s position on the difference between the policies on education enacted by Bush and Obama. Scherrer responded by stating that the Obama administration on this question, and many others, extended the right-wing policies of his predecessor. Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” was followed by Obama’s Race to the Top program, which promotes the victimization of teachers and the expansion of charter schools.



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