

SEP vice presidential candidate discusses political issues with striking Chicago teachers

An SEP campaign team
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Socialist Equality Party vice presidential candidate Phyllis Scherrer joined striking Chicago teachers on the picket line and at a rally of tens of thousands of teachers and their supporters Tuesday afternoon. After the rally, Scherrer delivered a statement to a group of teachers who listened attentively and then spoke with the SEP candidate about the political issues in their fight.

Addressing the teachers, Scherrer said, “On behalf of the Socialist Equality Party and my running mate, Jerry White, the SEP candidate for US president, I want to express my solidarity with the Chicago teachers who have taken a courageous stand against the attack on teachers and public education. I call on every section of workers in Chicago, throughout the US and internationally to support this critical struggle.

“In this battle, Chicago teachers are rejecting the lie that there is no money for the basic social rights of working people, including high quality public education, when trillions have been squandered on bank bailouts and wars. This strike is part of the growing opposition of the working class to the demands by capitalist governments all over the world for austerity.

“By taking this stand, teachers are explicitly challenging not only Mayor Rahm Emanuel, but the anti-teacher agenda of the Obama administration and the entire political establishment. Within hours of the walkout, both Republican candidate Mitt Romney and his running mate Paul Ryan denounced teachers and expressed their solidarity with the Democratic mayor, Rahm Emanuel.

“As a teacher in Pittsburgh I am intimately aware of the destructive impact of Obama’s Race to the Top, test-based ‘accountability’ schemes, school closings and the

promotion of charters and privatization. The Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are setting out to destroy public education and turn the clock backwards to the days when only the sons and daughters of the affluent were educated.

“Victory can only be achieved if teachers appeal to the broadest layers of the working class and wage a conscious political struggle against the Democratic Party and the dictatorship of the banks, which they uphold. Such a fight will not be carried out by the CTU and other teachers unions, which are allied with the Democrats, and are only asking to be partners in implementing the reactionary school ‘reform’ agenda of big business.

“The defense and vast improvement of public education is only possible through a radical redistribution of wealth and the breaking of the economic and political monopoly of the corporate and financial elite. The Socialist Equality Party is fighting for a workers’ government and socialism, in order to eradicate poverty, ensure social equality and provide the necessary resources for the material and cultural uplifting of all.”

Several of those listening asked the candidate about the SEP’s socialist program. Scherrer explained that both the Democrats and Republicans, from Obama, to Mitt Romney and Rahm Emanuel, defended the monopolization of society’s wealth by the corporate and financial elite. The SEP, she said, called for the nationalization of the banks and big business under the control of the working class, in order to pour trillions of dollars into public education and other vitally necessary services.

After the discussion one young teacher, Katie, purchased the SEP’s program and told Scherrer, “The

entire political system is bought with corporate money. I don't think they care about the 99 percent. The rhetoric is mostly to attack us. I voted for Rahm in 2011. I thought I trusted him because if Obama picks you, then there would be change. I voted for Obama in 2008 and I was one of those people who just bought it. Not anymore."

Several other teachers joined the discussion, with one asking, "Who decides where the money goes? We know that corporations run the Chicago Public Schools. It's the teachers who know how children learn and should run the schools not [CPS CEO Jean-Claude] Brizard and [Chief Education Advisor Barbara-Byrd] Bennett."

Another added, "The Obama administration is promoting inequality with Race to the Top. It is inherently unequal. Just like merit pay. It is unfair and lopsided. Teaching children who are poor and hungry is not the same as teaching kids that are well fed and well off."

Pointing to the statement in the SEP flyer that "The Democrats and Republicans are attacking teachers", one Hogan School teacher said, "I have been trying to tell my colleagues this for a while. We need our own party."

Another teacher asked the candidate, "Why are so many people afraid of socialism? This is something that really bothers me about Americans today. All the media tries its best to vilify socialism and communism, so I'm glad that you guys are out here, the real socialists. You're telling workers what socialism really is and why they should fight for." He also expressed interest in coming to the SEP showing of the documentary *Tsar to Lenin* about the Russian Revolution, and said he would urge fellow teachers to come along.



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