

Welsh voters denounce main parties

Our correspondent
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In the face of a mounting social crisis and growing alienation among voters, all the major parties in the Welsh Assembly joined together on Sunday to launch an “Equality Day”—with a joint press conference and sponsorship of an anti-racist rally. This bogus exercise reflects the fact that most of these parties fully expect to be part of a coalition government when the votes are counted.

None of them can address the question of social equality, or their actual record in stigmatising immigrants and asylum-seekers and blaming them for the problems created by the profit system.

During the course of the Socialist Equality Party’s campaign for the Welsh Assembly elections, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with several Cardiff residents. They spoke out about the problems they face and their concern about the eruption of militarism and war.

Mezbah Uddin from Bangladesh is a law student at Cardiff University. He drew attention to the statement made by Prime Minister Tony Blair in Cardiff this month, blaming Afro-Caribbean parents for the recent violent deaths of teenagers in London and other cities. Speaking to a select group of top businessmen, Blair said that it was wrong to deny the fact that violent gun and knife crime was a specific problem with black children, who were being brought up with no discipline as a result of absent fathers and called for the police to get “significantly tougher” with black youth.

“Everything is presented in racial terms these days,” Uddin said. “There was a recent incident in the US where three men raped a black girl and a local politician immediately said it was white guys. There was no evidence, and yet the politicians immediately spoke about it being a race crime. Whether you’re a white or black person, the responsibility of politicians should be to treat people as human beings first. The colour of anyone’s skin should be secondary.”

Uddin went on to denounce the US and British occupation of Iraq and predicted war against Iran. “What these governments are doing is obviously wrong. You cannot send your people to another country under false pretences and kill innocent people. Three young British soldiers have been killed in the past two weeks. These people had a whole life ahead of them, and now it is gone. They’ve been sacrificed for oil, and yet they were told they were going to that country for democracy.

“The US and Britain are now looking for excuses to attack Iran, and I think they’ll do it later this year. Iran was never a threat to America or the UK. The US previously backed Iraq against Iran, and now America is killing Iraqi people. It was the same thing with Osama bin Laden. The CIA supported bin Laden against the Russians in Afghanistan, and now he is the enemy.

“And what about Karzai, the prime minister of Afghanistan? He is a business partner of George Bush and used to live in America. He is a puppet. Even the United Nations seems to have become a puppet of America—that was seen in relation to the attack on Iraq.”

Asked to comment on the attacks on democratic rights in Britain, he replied, “The politicians place people in a state of fear over terrorism and then use this to take away their rights. People also hope that the government will take care of them, but it is not going to happen. Others think that as soon as Bush goes, then things will change and that the Americans will get out of Iraq. This is false.”

Uddin has serious injuries in his knees from two separate football accidents. Unable to stand for extended periods, he said that he had to wait three months for a scan and more than a year for reconstructive surgery. “Instead of all this money being spent on war, the government should use these funds to improve the National Health Service. No one should have to wait for this length of time for treatment.”

Eugenia Carmeli, originally from Italy and now living in Wales, was one of the hundreds of people who purchased the SEP manifesto in the past weeks. She had previously studied modern languages and literature at Cardiff University and hoped to find a local teaching job. She was unable to become a teacher, however, because she does not speak Welsh. Carmeli is currently working as a shop assistant in Cardiff.

A participant in the mass antiwar demonstrations in Italy four years ago, she said, “It was a lovely feeling to know that at the same time all over the world people were voicing their opposition to the war.

“Everyone was angry that the war in Afghanistan was going to be followed by a military attack on Iraq, and everyone knew that the reasons given—weapons of mass destruction and bringing democracy to Iraq—were lies. The real reason was to take the oil. The frustrating problem was that every government ignored the mass opposition.”

Asked about the Prodi coalition government in Italy and the support given to its war policies by Communist Refoundation, Carmeli replied: “They have taken advantage of the people’s trust. First, the Italian government said troops would be withdrawn from Iraq in three months time, then they said six months, and now it’s to be Christmas. And they’re also increasing the troops to Afghanistan. The troops are not doing anything to help the people in Afghanistan, but creating more disruption and divisions in the population. Sending more soldiers is not a solution at all. And it is going to come back on them sooner or later. People are not going to vote for Prodi or Rifondazione again.”

Carmeli said she was concerned about possible war with Iran and

warned that it would produce more terrorist attacks. “People will be more divided and afraid of each other. In Italy, after the Iraq war started, Muslim people were targeted and there were cases of arrest when people were held without charge,” she said.

Asked to comment on the SEP’s manifesto, she replied, “Your policies were exactly the issues I’d already been thinking about. My idea is that there should be no national boundaries. I love different cultures, but why do we need state borders? People should be able to live and work anywhere they want and have the same rights everywhere.”

Miranda Morgan, a social worker in her mid-30s who was born and raised in Pembrokeshire, purchased a copy of the SEP manifesto last week. A former member of the British armed forces, she previously voted Labour but was deeply angered over its betrayal of the working class.

“The manifestos issued by Labour always looked good on paper,” she said. “There were promises of jobs in the public sector and measures to try and get people back to work. But apart from some aspects of education, things have deteriorated dramatically for working class families.”

Morgan said social services in Wales were being run down, with inadequate funding and social workers overworked and demoralised. “I’m a social worker and deal with young people and families. This is an extremely stressful job because everything is a short-term band-aid response with little or no preventative work. I don’t know any social worker happy or satisfied with the situation.

“I worked with a single mother of three children on welfare. Her rent was £1,000 a month and she had no qualifications, but wanted to go out to work. She couldn’t, of course, because there was no way she would generate an income that would keep her family alive and keep a roof over their heads. It’s a vicious cycle. How do people in this situation find their way out of poverty, and what can I do as a social worker to help?”

Morgan explained that she served six years in the military before resigning in 1997. She recalled watching television footage of the US military assault on Iraq in 2003 with an army friend. “We couldn’t believe what was happening,” she said.

“From day one, my social conscience said that this was wrong and that there had to be some other way. Why do we have to resort always to the military, haven’t we learnt anything from history? We are supposed to have a wonderful democratic process.

“Four years on,” she continued, “I am incredibly angry about the decisions that were taken and the treatment of the soldiers who have been sent out to fight a war that no one agrees with. What are we doing?”

“When the 15 sailors were captured, one of the Iranian officials came on television and said he couldn’t believe that people in Britain joined the army to earn a living. This is something that stuck in my mind because I joined the army because there was no possibility of getting any other work.

“I was 18 and had missed out on a decent education because I had severe dyslexia and nobody realised, so the army was my only option. It seemed to offer a wonderful lifestyle and was the only way I knew to get out of Pembrokeshire and get a reasonable wage. I had friends, meals on the table, a social life, and it gave me some skills.”

Morgan put herself through college and university after leaving the army. A single mother with a three-year-old daughter, she accumulated a £20,000 debt to pay for education, which, she said, would take the rest of her working life to pay off.

“In that eight-year period, the housing market just took off and the cost of living increased dramatically. All the dreams and ambitions that I had in the Blair government and for myself evaporated. I am no better off now than I was then.”

She explained that many of her friends were still in the military, but deeply disturbed about the war in Iraq.

“It’s no business of the US government and Blair to tell the Iraqis what they have to do. Obviously, Saddam Hussein committed terrible atrocities, nobody is denying that, but these problems have to be sorted out by the Iraqi people. The world seems to have been turned upside down so the US can get hold of Iraqi oil.

“Many are now starting to ask whether Iraq is another Vietnam, and recruitment targets for the services from Wales are falling significantly. Is that a surprise? No doubt, there will be a point where the government tries to introduce compulsory national service.”

Opposing the cultivation of Welsh nationalism, Morgan said, “I agree with the preservation of culture and identity, but I don’t agree with discrimination against those who don’t speak Welsh. Some kids see England as a separate country and are scared to go and live and work there. This is ridiculous and very unhealthy. This shouldn’t be the case, and I’m not going to accept racism anywhere.

“I’m angered by all this because my father is Welsh. Wales is my home country, and my daughter was born here, but I’ve found a lot of racism—against the English and asylum-seekers—which I don’t like at all. My daughter even has problem at her school because she is regarded as English and they treat her differently because she grew up in England.

“I recently met some university students saying that there shouldn’t be any foreign students. I thought they were joking at first. These attitudes are deliberately promoted. And to say that Welsh workers will have a better future if Wales separates from Britain is a ludicrous idea and is not going to help anyone.

“I think that if working class people get to hear about your perspective and read your manifesto it will attract a lot of support. If there was a big socialist movement in this country it really could change things. If that doesn’t happen, then it will be quite frightening. It will be profit, profit, profit, and more wars and poverty.”

The SEP election site can be accessed at “Vote SEP for a socialist alternative in Scotland and Wales”.



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