

Britain: SEP campaign in Haltemprice and Howden by-election

Chris Talbot explains why he is standing

28 June 2008

Chris Talbot, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for the by-election in the constituency of Haltemprice and Howden, held a press conference at Cottingham Civic Hall in the village of Cottingham on June 27.

The by-election, which is in the East Ridings area of Yorkshire, will take place on Thursday, July 10. It was triggered by the resignation of sitting Conservative MP David Davis in protest at government “anti-terrorist” legislation enabling police to detain individuals for up to 42 days without charge.

Talbot explained why he was standing as a candidate for the Socialist Equality Party. The following are his remarks at the press conference:

The Socialist Equality Party took the decision that we would stand in the Haltemprice and Howden by-election very quickly after David Davis announced his resignation.

For years we have, on the *World Socialist Web Site*, consistently drawn attention to the labour government’s constant erosion of fundamental civil liberties in the name of combating the terrorist threat.

We have insisted that the responsibility for defending democratic rights rests with working people and demands a political break with Labour and the building of a genuine socialist party.

Firstly we have explained that Labour’s assault on our freedom to speak, to organise and to enjoy some safeguards against the constant intrusion of the state is not merely the product of an erroneous response to the threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism.

This places the cart before the horse. It is because Labour took Britain to war—first in Afghanistan, then Iraq and now it appears ever more likely against Iran—that has created the deep well of anger that is exploited by terrorist groupings.

That is why it is impossible to seriously oppose the attacks on democratic rights outside of a political struggle against militarism and war.

The drive to war in the Middle East and Central Asia is determined by the ambition of major corporations to control oil and other vital resources. That is why Tony Blair and now Gordon Brown have forged their political alliance with the Bush administration—to piggyback on US military might in order to secure a share of the world’s oil revenues for the British and global corporations to which Labour is entirely beholden.

The assault on democratic rights is determined by the domestic economic and political agenda of the government. As the representatives of a global financial oligarchy, Labour is tasked with destroying social provisions and slashing wages to pay for tax cuts for business and the super-rich.

Bitter experience has proven that it is impossible to secure a democratic mandate for measures that impoverish the majority of the people and enrich the few. And with recession now beginning to bite, Labour faces a rising tide of political and industrial opposition that it can only hope to defeat through repressive measures.

Labour’s support for the wealthy elite in Britain has earned it the enmity of the vast majority of the population. We are meeting today following the Henley by-election in which the Labour Party lost its deposit because it received less than five percent of the total vote. It also faces bankruptcy with debts of £24 million.

The Henley vote is very significant. It is the first time since 1976 that one of the major parties has finished fifth in an English by-election. It was not only defeated by the Conservative Party and the Liberals but was

beaten by the Green Party and the fascist British National Party.

Labour must be driven from office. But based on our understanding of the root cause of Labour's attacks, it is clear also that to entrust the defence of civil liberties to someone like David Davis or the Conservative Party as a whole would be the most dangerous mistake imaginable.

The Tories have blood on their hands for their support for the Afghan and Iraqi wars. And the Tories began the attack on democratic rights under Margaret Thatcher and would continue it should they take power. They share every essential aspect of Labour's pro-business and pro-war policies and will do whatever it takes to impose whatever attacks are required by big business on the working class in Britain and those peoples unfortunate enough to reside where oil, gas and mineral deposits are located or a rival economic power can be hamstrung by asserting military superiority.

Those Labour politicians and liberals who have backed Davis are at best deceiving themselves and at worst carrying out a deliberate betrayal—because they oppose any independent mobilisation of workers and youth that might threaten their own comfortable existence as defenders of the profit system.

In the next days there will be a concerted media effort to ridicule this by-election, utilising the services of various crank candidates, self-publicists, avowed right-wingers and the merely politically disoriented. But this only lets Labour off the hook—as it is meant to—and leaves Davis free to portray himself as the only viable and serious opposition to the government.

For our part, we take our responsibilities seriously. We will do everything possible with our limited resources and in the face of the blackout that the media invariably seeks to impose, to alert the electorate of Haltemprice and Howden and all those concerned with safeguarding democratic rights to the fundamental issues that are now at stake.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact