

Haltemprice and Howden by-election hustings

Britain: Socialist Equality Party outlines differences with the Greens

Our correspondent
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Socialist Equality Party member Richard Turner, who is acting as the election agent for SEP candidate Chris Talbot, was able to address a public forum for candidates in the Haltemprice and Howden by-election. Talbot was attending another engagement.

The “hustings” were organised on the initiative of one of the Independents standing as a candidate in the by-election and were attended by five candidates in total, including Green party candidate Shan Oakes. Turner used his 10-minute address to both detail the policies advanced by the SEP, but also to explain the differences between these socialist policies to defend civil liberties and the perspective advanced by the Greens.

“The Socialist Equality Party has consistently pointed to the Labour government’s constant erosion of fundamental civil liberties in the name of combating the terrorist threat,” Turner explained.

“However, unlike all the other parties and candidates in this by-election, we insist 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.”

Explaining how Labour took Britain into illegal wars in Afghanistan and then Iraq, Turner continued, “It is impossible to seriously oppose the attacks on democratic rights at home outside of a political struggle against militarism and war.”

“It is now clear for all to see that Labour has long abandoned any pretence to be a party that carries out reforms in the interest of working people. Like the Tories, they are completely beholden to big business and defending the interests of the wealthy.

“However, the failure of reformism—the claim that it is possible to carry through some minimal social policies within the framework of the capitalist nation state—goes

far beyond Labour.

“So what about the Greens? Their manifesto makes some fine sounding promises on questions such as the environment, the economy and so on.

“In her address to this forum, the Green Party candidate referred to the sister Green parties in other countries.

“It is instructive to look at the record of these parties. In those countries where the Greens have entered government, either at regional or national level—they have shown that they quickly abandon their pacifism and reformist claims.

“In Germany, the Green Party, when in coalition with the Social Democrats, have supported the sending of troops to Afghanistan, and pushed through some of the most far-reaching attacks on that country’s welfare system.

“At their conference last year, the party adopted a new economic programme—‘the Green free market economy’—which hails the capitalist market as the guardian angel of the environment!

“And now, in the city of Hamburg, they have even entered a coalition with the conservative Christian Democratic Union, dropping their much-touted environmental demands—such as opposing the building of a new coal-fired power station—as the price for taking a place at the cabinet table.”

“In her remarks,” Turner continued, “the Green Party candidate advocated a retreat to ‘local production,’ behind the national, if not even the county borders—something that would equate to a return to some form of semi-feudal subsistence economy.

“The SEP takes a completely opposite stance. Today, globalisation links the fate of millions of ordinary people around the world. Working people cannot defend their incomes, their families or the future of their children by

retreating back within the national borders.

“The problems that confront humanity in the 21st century are global problems and require an international perspective and an international organisation... Above all, the present crisis is a product of the breakdown of the profit system—a system based on the irrational anarchy of ‘market forces.’ It is not a lack of resources that is the problem but the completely irrational nature of the present system.

“In contrast to the Greens, we insist that it is not possible to provide a progressive solution to such problems without developing an unprecedented level of international cooperation, something that is impossible on the basis of capitalism.

“The defence of basic democratic rights cannot be seen in isolation from this broader perspective.

“We advocate the building of an international socialist party to coordinate the struggles of working people, who face common problems in whatever country they live. Fundamentally, it requires the complete reorganisation of society, replacing production for profit with socialist measures that meet the needs of the many, not the bank balances of the few.”

A member of the audience asked Turner, “Do you think the Greens are your rivals?”

He replied that he wanted to delineate our perspective from that of the Greens and the other parties standing in this election. Unlike them, we are for the working class owning and controlling the production process. It was not lack of resources that is the main problem; it’s that the resources are owned by massive corporations.

Another asked, “Isn’t it the case that the working class is not all socialist. It is not always for socialism.”

Turner replied that it was not an issue of whether this or that worker at any given time considered themselves to be socialist, but the fact that socialism represents the historic interests of the working class as a whole. What the SEP is fighting for is to develop socialist consciousness in the working class. It is only when workers have socialist consciousness that they can be a force to change society.

Patricia Botham spoke to the Socialist Equality Party campaign team in Cottingham, the largest village in the constituency of Haltemprice and Howden.

She said, “Nobody stands up for the working class. David Davis has got no right to speak on anything. I wouldn’t vote for the Conservatives but have been a long-time Labour voter. I was the local union representative. I was a home helper for 34 years and was in the local government workers union. I am now 74 and I can’t

afford anything unless I pay through the eyes and nose. I have got a state pension and a work pension and that needs to go up.

“The thing is the price of everything is going up and it’s all wrong. They put the prices up on the buses and there is no sign to say that and then the conductor faces all the anger from the passengers.

“A lot more should be done for the working class. I think it is right that you are standing, that there is a socialist candidate in this election. I’ll tell you one thing I don’t agree with and that’s this dolly bird standing [The Miss Great Britain Party]. What does she know?

“I think I will vote the Socialist Equality Party in the election. I’ve looked at other candidates and they are just walking around shaking hands with everybody.”

Brenda is a retired local government worker who worked in Hull. She said, “I think this election David Davis called is a big con of the public. He knew Labour would not stand against him and then the Liberal Democrats stood down from challenging him. I think they made an arrangement, a pact before he decided to give up his seat.

“He knew full well he wasn’t risking his seat and that is why I would like to get the man out. I have considered myself a socialist all my life. I joined the Labour Party when I was 15. I still give them £2.50 a month, but don’t vote for them anymore. The problem with our voting system is that you can’t get minority parties elected.

“I think that we must have the voting system changed because as it stands the main parties have got it all tied up.

“All the main parties are the same now and everyone is baffled. They say, ‘We don’t know who to vote for now.’ People just feel disenfranchised and not just over voting but over a lot of things.”



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