

Socialist Equality Party Manifesto for the 2010 British general election

6 April 2010

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown is expected to ask for the dissolution of Parliament today, in preparation for a general election on May 6.

The Socialist Equality Party of Britain is standing two candidates. David O'Sullivan, 46, will be standing in Oxford East. Born in London, he has been active in socialist politics since 1984. Formerly a mechanical engineer at Rolls Royce, Watford, until its closure, he now works on the London Underground. He is married with six children and one grandchild.

Robert Skelton, 40, will be standing in Manchester Central. He was born and lives in Manchester. Active in socialist politics since 1988, he writes regularly for the World Socialist Web Site, covering workers' struggles across Europe. He was formerly employed in call centre work until becoming a full-time carer.

- No cuts in pay, jobs or services
- End the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan
- Break with Labour—for a new socialist party
- Build international workers' unity
- For a workers' government and socialist policies

The Socialist Equality Party calls for a vote for our candidates, who are standing to prepare an independent political movement of the working class against austerity, militarism and war.

This general election is a political fraud. Whatever the make-up of the next government, its agenda has already been determined. The international financial institutions, the major corporations and all the official parties intend to make working people foot the bill for an economic crisis that is not of their making.

The Socialist Equality Party rejects all calls for “sacrifice”—cuts in pay, jobs and vital social services. The worst economic crisis since the 1930s was precipitated by the criminal speculative practices of the major banks and financial institutions. Their actions brought the world economy to the brink of meltdown. Yet, almost two years on, no one has been held to account. Nor has a single measure been implemented to check the activities of the banks and hedge funds. Instead, close to £10 trillion—one quarter of the world's GDP—has been handed over to the banks.

In Britain, the total bill for the Labour government's stimulus packages is set to reach £1 trillion—enough to fund the National Health Service for a decade.

Big business and the banks are using the financial crisis to restructure economic and social relations in their interests. What was presented as an emergency measure to prevent a global economic collapse is nothing more than a plundering of public funds to bail out the guilty and allow them to continue their parasitic activities. This will have dire consequences for generations to come.

The world's billionaires saw their wealth grow by 50 percent last year, to a net worth of £2.4 trillion. These 1,000 or so individuals command personal wealth larger than the gross domestic products of every country save China, Japan and the United States.

In contrast, entire countries are threatened with bankruptcy, and their governments—whether “labour” or “conservative”—are pushing through major attacks on workers' jobs, wages and social services. The first targets have been Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal, and the eastern European and Baltic states. But this is only the start. A precedent is being set that will be followed across Europe and internationally.

The International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank have specified that massive cuts must be made in Britain of up to 20 percent of public spending by whatever government takes power. None of the cuts proposed will ever be reversed. Instead, a huge leap will be taken in the ongoing destruction of what remains of the health service, state education and welfare. The talk of a “jobless” or “job-loss recovery” makes clear that pay cuts, speed-up and job losses will be permanent.

The unfolding financial catastrophe is not simply a temporary downturn, but the failure of an entire system—capitalism. All of the official institutions—Parliament, the Bank of England, the Financial Services Authority and the media—are complicit in financial gangsterism that is systemic and unprecedented in scale.

Alongside the spectre of another Great Depression comes the turn to militarism and war. The United States, backed by the UK, has led the way in waging colonial wars of conquest in Afghanistan and Iraq aimed at securing control over vital markets and resources. The growth of militarism poses immense dangers. Just as at the start of the twentieth century, economic dislocation is sharply increasing tensions between the major powers, leading to protectionism and trade war and raising the spectre of a new world war that threatens the very survival of humanity.

The working class must have its own answer to the crisis. This cannot be found on a purely national basis. In the fight against austerity and war, workers confront not only their own government and state apparatus, but the ruling classes of Europe, Asia and America, the banks and the major corporations.

To combat this, an international counteroffensive against global capital is needed.

Strikes and protests have broken out across Europe. They are proof that workers everywhere share common problems and interests that are irreconcilably opposed to those of the ruling elites. The objective conditions are emerging for a European-wide movement of the working class, as part of an international resurgence of the class struggle. What is required above all is the conscious adoption of a socialist programme for the reorganisation of the world economy to meet social needs, not private profit.

Labour: A right-wing party of big business

The worsening situation facing working people is the direct responsibility of the Labour government. Its 13 years in office confirm

that Labour is a right-wing party of big business, no less than the Conservatives.

Boasting that New Labour was “intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich,” the government claimed that by making the interests of the City of London and big business its priority it had put an end to “boom and bust.” All it achieved was to complete Britain’s transformation into an on-shore tax haven and a centre for swindlers and financial racketeering. Following in the footsteps of Margaret Thatcher, Labour slashed corporation tax and freed the City from virtually all regulation, so that many leading firms pay virtually no tax year after year.

In the interests of a super-rich financial oligarchy, every aspect of life has been subordinated to the market. The result has been a rise in social inequality to levels not seen since before the creation of the welfare state at the end of World War Two.

The government admits that Britain “is an unequal country, more so than other industrialised countries and more so than it was a generation ago.” The wealthiest 10 percent of the population are 100 times better off than the poorest 10 percent, who survive on just £56 a week. The richest 0.5 percent of the population receives a greater share of national wealth than in 1937.

Deindustrialisation and the destruction of jobs paying a living wage have produced a massive extension in part-time employment, with more than 40 percent of men and 30 percent of women forced into temporary jobs. This has pushed down wage rates so that the adult minimum wage of £5.80 per hour is now the norm. Four million children live in poverty, with 1.7 million in severe poverty.

To make ends meet, families have taken on a mountain of debt—totalling £1.5 trillion, or £116,000 per household. The bulk is in mortgages, threatening many with homelessness if they fail to keep up payments. Average unsecured debt (loans and credit cards) stands at more than £18,500 per household.

The banks are choking off lending to individuals and small businesses, while the Royal Bank of Scotland, majority-owned by the taxpayer following the largest-ever bailout in world history, paid out between £1.5 billion and £2 billion in bonuses.

While the rich glut themselves, every effort by workers to defend their jobs, wages and conditions is met with furious denunciations and even legal action.

As the official political parties compete over the scale of cuts to the public sector, unemployment is expected to reach 3 million by the end of the year. A falling pound and rising prices will tip many more into poverty.

After relentless government and media witch-hunts against “welfare scroungers,” rising joblessness is forcing many more to survive on benefits set at less than £70 a week. The sick and the disabled face the removal of their entitlements altogether.

Things are particularly severe for young people. Twenty percent of under-25-year-olds are jobless. Many have no income at all and have little hope of finding a way out of their desperate circumstances. Fully 200,000 youth were denied university places this year due to budget cuts. Tens of thousands of students forced to take out loans to fund their education face unemployment or dead-end jobs, and debts that can never be repaid.

Labour: A party of war

Along with the attacks on workers’ living standards, Labour has been the most enthusiastic backer of US militarism and has fully supported the illegal doctrine of pre-emptive war.

The majority of the population oppose the war in Iraq and the continued

occupation of Afghanistan. Still the killing continues. Estimates of violent civilian deaths in Iraq range from 100,000 to more than 600,000. In Afghanistan, so far this year, more than 1,440 civilians have been killed—almost equalling the combined death toll for the previous eight years. Hundreds of British soldiers have died, while the cost to the UK of both interventions has exceeded £20 billion.

Despite one inquiry after another, no one has been prosecuted for the war crimes for which they are responsible. Ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair postures as a Middle East “peace envoy” and rakes in millions from lucrative contracts, including deals with oil corporations with interests in Iraq. Meanwhile, his co-conspirators have dispatched additional troops to Afghanistan while making their own fortunes from business lobbyists.

The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats fully support this war drive. Their criticisms of the government centre on how the war effort should be funded. Behind the barrage of calls to “stand behind our boys,” an attempt is underway to legitimise the Afghan and Iraq occupations and prepare the way for new wars of conquest.

Every day brings fresh demands for more military spending, with £100 billion to be spent on replacing the Trident nuclear system. Like America’s missile defence shield, this has nothing to do with defence and is directed against the rivals of Washington and London, above all China and Russia.

Labour: A party of authoritarianism

Labour has systematically dismantled civil liberties under the guise of the “war on terror.” Internationally, the government is complicit in all the crimes perpetrated by Washington: torture, extraordinary rendition and targeted assassinations. It has promised its allies such as Israel that Britain is a safe place for war criminals.

At home, the measures taken by Labour constitute the legal framework for a police state. Habeas corpus—freedom from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment—has been undermined, the right to jury trial curtailed, freedom of speech and expression restricted and the presumption of innocence jettisoned. In addition to granting itself the right to declare a state of emergency without recourse to Parliament, the government enacted a secretive “shoot to kill” policy that claimed the life of Jean Charles de Menezes.

These measures have been largely accepted by all the official parties, confirming that the political establishment in Britain has abandoned any genuine commitment to democratic norms. Parliament has become little more than a rubber stamp for whatever policies are demanded by the super-rich, and an arena for MPs to line their pockets at taxpayers’ expense.

Democracy is incompatible with social inequality and militarism. There can be no popular mandate for policies that are directed against the interests of the mass of the population. They must be imposed.

The initial target of the government’s anti-democratic measures has been Britain’s minority communities, which have been subjected to “terror” raids, harassment and police stop-and-search operations. The hysteria against Muslims, asylum seekers and immigrants is intended to justify these repressive measures and to divide working people along racial and religious lines.

More recently, demonstrators and innocent bystanders have been beaten and even killed by police with impunity, and protest organisations infiltrated by state spies and provocateurs.

A warning must be taken from the media descriptions of the British Airways strike as industrial “terrorism.” The ruling elite’s response to the social and political discontent that will inevitably develop over the next period will be state violence.

A socialist programme for the working class

Everything depends on the building of a new and genuinely socialist party of the working class.

The SEP rejects the claim that the Labour Party is the “lesser evil” in these elections. It is a party of the class enemy. Equally, the trade unions function today as an arm of management in helping to impose the attacks demanded by the corporations and the government. The unions’ promotion of economic nationalism is inseparable from their support for austerity measures in the “national interest” and in defence of Britain’s competitiveness. Even when forced to call strikes, their only aim is to dissipate social anger before organising the inevitable betrayal.

Entirely new forms of struggle are needed. The SEP actively supports every effort by working people to organise independently of the old bureaucratic organisations. This is vital in the construction of a *politically* independent movement of the working class based on a socialist programme and the fight for a workers’ government.

The Socialist Equality Party stands for:

1. The international unity of the working class

The global integration of the world economy provides the basis for meeting all of humanity’s needs. Instead, under capitalism, it is used to undermine the conditions of workers everywhere.

Workers must reject all forms of racism and nationalism, including its British, Scottish, English and Welsh variants. They must link their struggles with those developing across Europe as the precondition for opposing the offensive of the banks and global corporations.

We say: No to the Europe of big business! Yes to the United Socialist States of Europe, as part of the rational reorganisation of economic life to meet the needs of the world’s people!

2. Social ownership of the banks and major corporations

The monopoly over society exercised by the financial and corporate elite is incompatible with a progressive, democratic resolution to the crisis.

We say: Cancel all debts to the international finance institutions! Transform the banks and major corporations into publicly owned and democratically controlled utilities!

3. Redistribution of wealth

The complex requirements of modern life cannot be met within the framework of an economic system based on the ever-greater enrichment of a parasitic elite. The ill-gotten wealth of the super-rich must be expropriated and used to provide for basic social needs.

4. An emergency public works programme

The measures listed above will provide the necessary resources to implement a massive programme of public works that will end the scourge of unemployment and provide decent-paying jobs, free and high-quality health, housing, education and social provisions for all throughout their lives.

5. An end to militarism and war

Workers must take a determined stand against the military exploits of the British ruling class. All British troops must be withdrawn from Iraq, Afghanistan and wherever else they are stationed. Compensation must be paid to those countries devastated by the British military, and the architects of these wars must be placed on trial for war crimes. NATO must be dismantled, the nuclear weapons programme cancelled and Britain’s armaments industry converted to socially useful production.

6. Defend democratic rights

Social equality is the precondition for genuine democracy. On these foundations the entire legal system must be overhauled. Labour’s anti-terrorism legislation and other measures that have curtailed individual

liberties must be rescinded. All anti-trade union and anti-strike legislation must be overturned. Measures must be enacted to ensure popular control over political and economic decision-making.

The Socialist Equality Party is the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. It stands in the tradition of the most courageous and far-sighted representatives of the international working class, who dedicated themselves to the struggle for socialism in the fight against all forms of nationalism and political opportunism.

Our party has its origins in the struggle of the Left Opposition, led by Leon Trotsky, in defence of the perspective of world socialist revolution against the monstrous Stalinist bureaucracy that arose in the Soviet Union. It continues the work of the Fourth International, which Trotsky founded in 1938.

Together with our sister parties in Europe, North America, Australia and Asia, we work to establish the international unity and socialist reorientation of the workers’ movement through the daily news and analysis provided by the *World Socialist Web Site*—wsws.org.

We urge all those who support a socialist alternative to mass unemployment, repression and war to participate in our election campaign, vote for our candidates and join the Socialist Equality Party.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact