

Oxford East voters speak following SEP candidate's appearance at election hustings

Our reporter
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Over the last week, David O'Sullivan, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for Oxford East, has been able to address a series of general election hustings organised by various churches and organisations such as Oxfam and the Stop the War Coalition.

In these meetings he has sought to expose that all the official parties are committed to policies of austerity, militarism and war, as they attempt to force the burden of the economic crisis onto the backs of working people. He has cited the support of Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives for maintaining the occupation of Afghanistan and how they have all drawn up massive spending cuts, which will lead to hundreds of thousands of job losses and cuts in wages.

His intervention has won a serious response from those looking for an alternative to the big business parties.

John Green heard O'Sullivan at both the Oxfam and Stop The War Coalition hustings. He said, "The debate was very stage-managed. In the main there are three parties who are pretty much the same. With the Conservatives it is pain now and with Labour it is pain deferred. That's essentially the difference between them. They don't really address issues like Afghanistan. That a taboo in this campaign. All the major parties are unanimous on support for 'our boys'. But I think it will backfire on them. You have all these coffins coming back and I think people will get sick of the sight of it because they've been trying to whip up a 'help for heroes' campaign. You do get a type of affection for the British armed forces amongst some people and they are trying to translate it into support for the war. But you can still make the distinction between not wanting the troops to get killed and opposition to the war, which is as strong as ever.

"There was nothing I disagreed with in Dave

O'Sullivan's remarks. He is easily the most anti-war candidate by some distance. He is far to the left of all the other candidates.

"On the banks, I would have let them go to the wall. They shouldn't have thrown all that money at the banks—Absolutely not. All these banks are basically like a cartel. It's like all the supermarkets, petrol companies and so on. It's the illusion of choice, but it's all a con. Why do we need all the banks? Why not just have one, a People's Bank or whatever you want to call it?"

Russell, a student at the University of Oxford, spoke to the WSWWS after a hustings organised by the Stop the War Coalition.

He said, "Most of the candidates were not in line with the audience. They were saying things that expressed that they were anti-war, that they wanted the troops to come home and that they were not doing any good there. But unfortunately what happens in these type of events is that people come and they give the message they think the audience wants to hear. So what the parliamentary candidate for the Liberal Democrats was saying is not exactly what his party leader Nick Clegg is saying.

"But the Green candidate and the Socialist Equality Party candidate were very powerful about the need to scrap trident and remove the troops from Afghanistan and not initiate any illegal wars of intervention.

"The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were immoral wars. They were a complete obscenity. It is shocking that people are able to forget the death and destruction of so many people's lives. People often talk about the deaths of British soldiers, and the sadness that causes the country to think that over 200 people have died. But in Iraq and Afghanistan, thousands of civilians have died, maybe up to half a million people killed. They didn't choose to be engaged in a war. The British soldiers chose to go.

Civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan had no choice. No one gave them a vote on war and whether they should die. We often just think about the things that affect us and we don't imagine the families, the orphans and widows in Iraq and Afghanistan and the massacres.

"It's very clear that the economic crash only involved a tiny elite but it has affected the majority of the people. Houses are being repossessed. People are being thrown out of their homes, losing their jobs. Families are living in poverty now because of the actions of a few people in major positions in the banks. The political elite are also responsible for the crash, because they didn't regulate the banks. After all, it is the government that it meant to run the country, not the banks. So it is a real failure on the part of Labour.

"I picked up the SEP manifesto this evening and I am going to read it. I thought the SEP candidate was very impressive and very inspirational. You don't hear that sort of thing often, and you certainly don't hear it in the media. Parties like the SEP are marginalised and I actually think they represent the interests of the majority of people."

Peter Byles is a former BMW worker, now employed as a home carer. He met O'Sullivan while he was campaigning on the streets of Oxford.

He explained, "There are two distinct workforces at BMW. There are the agency workers who are treated like crap. They can be sacked at a moment's notice. They get all the worst jobs. There is no job security there at all.

"The BMW workers aren't treated much better. But the unions do not stand up for the agency workers at all. They seem to condone the management's treatment of them and the two-speed system that they've got. The agency workers don't get the same rate of pay or benefits. You think that might be okay if it's only going to be for three months, or six months. But there are people who have been working for an agency for four or five years with no real prospect of getting a BMW job.

"The ratios that the union agree to is that BMW will take a certain percentage of the workforce on. But that doesn't happen in practise, because all the company does is change the targets to meet the 'global conditions'. That makes everything the union promises null and void. There is no leadership at all. People are disillusioned with the union, but they are scared to put their head above the parapet because they will be out on their ear.

"I voted for IWCA (Independent Workers Community

Association) in the last election, but this time I think it will be definitely for the Socialist Equality Party. Somebody at some point has got to stand up and say, 'look, things have got to change'. Unless people are prepared to do that, and not vote for one of the big parties, then nothing is going to change.

"The main problem I have as a carer is financial. I have a disabled little daughter. I had to give up work because my partner died and I have to look after my daughter full time. I don't get help with transport or things like that. I have hospital appointments two or three times a week, which means I have to get two or three buses carrying my daughter's pump around with me because she is fed by pump. It's a nightmare. She has a hole in the heart. She has a condition called hypo-petunis. She has a cleft palate and some minor brain damage. It's hard work and it's a 24-hour a day job.

"She has had funding to go to a special nursery since October, but hasn't been able to go because they haven't got the staff necessary to train the people at the nursery to look after her. I wrote to Andrew Smith who is the Labour MP about it and he said he would look into it. He has come back and said it's a funding issue! But the funding is being paid to the nursery to look after my daughter so that money is just being wasted because she is not going because they can't train up the people to look after her. It's ridiculous.

"The money is being wasted on a war based on lies. And people are going out there and dying with no plan in place for anything. It represents the way the whole country is going.

"They are talking about 20 percent spending cuts. That's massive, it's just not sustainable. Where is that going to come from? It's not going to be the rich. It's going to be the working class. It's going to be our health service that is going to be cut, our transport, our kids' futures, their education, their after-school facilities. The kids of the rich can afford to go to special facilities, paid for by their company perks. It's the working class that it comes down on. The one's who don't have any voice now. That's what we need—we need a voice. People have got to stand up and be counted and say we want change, we have had enough."



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