

Britain: David O'Sullivan addresses hustings in Oxford East

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Over the past week, David O'Sullivan, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for Oxford East, has spoken at a number of local hustings organised by the church and various community organisations leading up to the May 6 General Election.

He has sought to expose the pretensions of the official parties—Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat—that they can effect change in the interests of working people and has stressed their real agenda of austerity and war.

The alienation felt by many from the official parties finds its reflection in the attempts by their local representatives to distance themselves from the policies of their national organisation.

At the church hustings in the centre of Oxford, for example, the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative candidates spoke of making “careful cuts” in public spending while defending “frontline services”, such as health.

O'Sullivan rejected such claims as lies. He stressed that irrespective of the make-up of the next government, its agenda had already been determined by the international financial institutions, the major corporations and the official parties who were set on making working people foot the bill for an economic crisis that is not of their making.

When the official parties speak of making “efficiencies” and “savings” they are really talking about cuts in jobs and wages, he said. A massive attack on living standards and all aspects of life was on the agenda. The situation in Greece is an example of how entire countries are now threatened with bankruptcy and how, in cohorts with the banks, all governments are imposing austerity measures.

Rejecting any cuts in social provision, jobs and wages, O'Sullivan insisted that the monopoly over society exercised by the financial and corporate elite was incompatible with a progressive, democratic solution to the crisis. The only answer was the complete re-organisation of economic life on a socialist basis—to repudiate the debts to the financial institutions; nationalise the banks and major corporations under workers' control; redistribute wealth from the rich to working people and stop funding illegal wars and occupations.

In answer to questions on how the various parties would develop a “fair” immigration system, all the candidates—including the Greens—spoke of regulating entry to the country. In his reply, O'Sullivan noted that immigration had been the first question put before the main party leaders in the first of the stage-managed, televised debates. The problem facing Britain was not immigrants, O'Sullivan insisted, rather it is they who were being made scapegoats in order to divert from the real questions facing working people.

While capital was free to move around the globe, the official parties try to clamp down on workers attempting to flee often desperate circumstances that have been created by the major powers. The SEP was opposed to all restrictions on freedom of movement, which is a basic democratic right.

The same evening O'Sullivan addressed a meeting of the Stop the War Coalition in Oxford Town Hall. He explained that the SEP was standing in order to prepare an independent movement of the working class against austerity, militarism and war.

“US imperialism is the most destabilising factor in world politics,” he said. “Its military aggression is directly bound up with the attempt to offset its declining economic position against its major rivals.

The Labour government has been the most enthusiastic backer of US militarism and has fully supported the illegal doctrine of pre-emptive war.”

To a round of applause, O’Sullivan demanded the immediate withdrawal of all British troops from Afghanistan and wherever else they were stationed; for Iraq and Afghanistan to be compensated for the devastation caused by US and British imperialism; and for Tony Blair and Gordon Brown to be placed on trial for war crimes.

Replying to a question on the development of Islamophobia, the SEP candidate held the Labour Party politically responsible for deliberately cultivating anti-Muslim hysteria. The purpose of this, he explained, was to justify the draconian attacks on civil liberties introduced under the guise of the “war on terror”. He called for opposition to all forms of racism and discrimination and for the development of working class unity in a struggle against the war-mongering Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy.

Another questioner asked the candidates whether Britain should “continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with the US or whether you would favour an independent foreign policy for Britain”.

The major parties stressed the importance of an alliance with the United States, while the Green candidate argued that the UK “should be independent from America. If we stand with the US, it should be only on an issue by issue basis,” she said.

O’Sullivan replied, “We stand shoulder to shoulder with the American working class, which seems to be the great unmentionable. The drive to war abroad means class war at home. The greatest protection that can be afforded for the masses in the Middle East is the struggle by the American working class against US imperialism. Similarly, the greatest service workers in Britain can perform for their class brothers and sisters in the Middle East is to take up the struggle for the overthrow of British imperialism.”

“We are not a national party,” he said. “We are an international party and workers can only go forward on an international strategy.”



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