

# SEP campaign in Oxford East: Cowley Road residents interviewed

Our correspondent  
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Socialist Equality Party campaigners have been speaking to voters and residents around Cowley Road in the East Oxford constituency. Discussions have thrown up diverse experiences, reflecting the varied character of the area.

*Dr Aparna Bhosale is a medical researcher on oncology at Oxford University. Dr Bhosale was keen to talk of her experiences as a doctor in rural India.*

Coming from India, my husband and I always thought everything was perfect in England. When I went for my interview in London, I was shocked to see beggars on the streets and people living on the pavements, especially females, or 10 to 15 people living in one house.

I saw the film “Dirty Pretty Things” about the sale of kidneys for money and couldn’t believe it was true, but my friend who is a doctor here said that this does happen in Britain.

I had the same experience in India where two men had come to the hospital with abdominal pain. Later I saw the sachets at the side of their bodies and asked them what had happened. They said they did not know. The sister at the hospital said that they had had an operation to remove their kidneys. Later on they found the doctors who had done this.

During the second year of my medical studies I had to conduct post-mortems. The second case I had was a dowry death (the death of a woman, either murdered or being driven to suicide, by husbands and their family in an attempt to secure a larger dowry). Even though she had given a statement before she died to the police that threats had been made on her life and her child’s, nothing happened. She died, and her child died trying to save her.

The constable changed the details because she wasn’t from a well-to-do family and her husband wanted to get married again.

Whilst in India I have experienced and seen so many things. Dandali is a small village where I used to practice. The people live in tribal groups in the jungle and live in the trees, because there are so many poisonous animals about. A 16-year-old girl who was due to have twins was brought to our camp in a cart, and one of the babies’ hands was already out. We gave her a caesarean section. It was then that I became aware that people were living in such dirty conditions. These people have no currency to pay the hospital, so were paying in fruit and nuts.

Me and a group of doctors set up a camp there and looked into it, but none of the other doctors were keen to stay there because of language barriers. I stayed there with a friend and tried to educate a female about the dangers of multiple pregnancies and the danger of her dying. The villagers threatened to kill me and said, “Don’t educate them if you want to live.” I carried on working there as there are no midwives. As an example of how poor the area is, the richest family was able to pay 280rs (£3).

Most of the children have skin allergies—like the worst form of eczema with black and bleeding hands. This came from the dirty water in the river, which was contaminated by the leather works and chemicals leaking into the water. This was reported to the local authorities who fixed the problem.

People say I’m crazy, that I will bring trouble onto myself. I would like to change society and think I have started doing that. I didn’t get paid when I was working in the villages. My fellow doctors didn’t agree with what

I was doing—but I feel I have left them behind.

I am surprised about how the National Health Service works in Britain, because it gives the impression that it's free and available on demand. But I have become aware since I have been here how long someone has to wait to see a doctor or consultant, never mind get treatment.

*Laura Kidd has a drama degree, but is working as a waitress.*

When I finished university it took me a good two months to get a job. I went to London to do charity work, but travelling from Oxford and back was a nightmare, so I had to look for somewhere here. Even if you get a job, there is a long process of waiting around. You get worried, you want to do stuff with your friends but you don't have any money and you can't live without it.

I did a drama degree. You're meant to be 40 percent more employable, but that doesn't mean you can get into an area you want to be in. There have been loads of cuts in art funding and theatre. They don't want someone who doesn't have experience, even though you bring something good and new to the table. But that's not an option—they see you as just graduated, and it's such a difficult industry to get into anyway. There are people—producers, actors, behind the scenes people—who are all getting cut. There are so many theatres shutting down.

I think theatre is a really good way to get everyone involved in politics. That's how I got into it. I was reading plays and I didn't realise the politics of it all—plays by Harold Pinter, for example. You've always got this pressure from the outside. Everything that goes on within the room is from outside. You never see the outside. You never see the regime outside. But you can feel how people are affected by it on a personal level. Rather than going, "Oh look at him, look at what he's doing," you understand that society has got to these people.

You do get a certain type of person going to the theatre, maybe because it's expensive. But theatre used to have you shouting at the actors on stage. That's what theatre was, and I think it should be more like that. It's not about how lovely this life is on the stage. You can comment on something.

I really like writing, and that's why I want to get more switched-on politically. People can pick holes in your argument, but if you've got a strong grip on what is going on around you and what people want, you can make a connection with people. I think it's really important to tug

at a heartstring. Otherwise, what's the point? Going to university has made me realise that the people who have made an impact on the arts, even painting, they've had something deep and meaningful to say. They haven't talked about rubbish. They've tried to illustrate points about society.

When I came back to Oxford, I noticed there were a lot more homeless people out on the street. I work in a restaurant, and there are ten or so people every day coming in to ask for jobs. CV's are always being handed in. People want back-of-house jobs, chef jobs, anything.

My brother works at BMW, and they've cut loads of jobs there. Luckily he's on an apprenticeship. I live near there. In my gran's generation, lots of people used to work at Cowley. There used to be thousands of jobs.

Both my granddad and my gran worked there, thousands of people from the area, all on bikes. The factory used to be huge in the 1950s. That created a community, and it must have brought people together. I think that must have been a good thing, all these people doing the same job. Things are more split now. Being laid off would make you feel bitter when you've been there for years and now you don't have a job. One of my friends got laid off. He's been there for 35 years. They don't pick certain people—they just chop the load off. You are just a name on a bit of paper.

The plant is not even a quarter of the size it was. That's got to cope with the machines as well. They go far faster. There are weird shift patterns. You either work all day or all night, then get up the next day at four or five. I think it's hard work. That's why they have a week on and a week off. You couldn't do more, but the machine keeps going. You can't step off that line, even to go to the toilet. You've got to stay on it.

Production now is less than it was. My dad works for a small engineering company, and they are suffering. People aren't buying as they were. I don't understand why people are laid off. I would have thought it would be more productive to have people bringing money in.



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