Socialist Equality Party receives warm response in Manchester and Oxford

Our reporters
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Socialist Equality Party election teams campaigned recently in the Manchester Central constituency, where SEP candidate Robert Skelton is standing in the May 6 General Election. They received a warm response from area residents, who live in one of the poorest regions in Britain.

According to a survey published in 2007, more than 50,000 people within a four-mile radius of Manchester's city centre live in poverty. In five of the wards in Manchester Central, including Bradford, Hulme, Ardwick, Beswick and Clayton, and Moss Side, nearly all children are classified as poor. A study issued by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion in 2008 reports that the constituency was fourth worst in the nation in terms of child poverty.

Skelton and supporters campaigned at the North City Shopping Centre, which is used by many residents from the ward of Moston (about three miles northeast of the city centre). Teams also campaigned at Newton Heath, Hulme and Moss Side.

At the North City Shopping Centre, Indica spoke to the SEP about her quest for work after losing her job in 2009 as a customer service manager earning £25,000 to £30,000 a year.

"In the first three months of losing my job, I applied for well over a hundred jobs", she explained. "I got two replies saying, 'not interested,' and I had one interview where they thought I was going for a sales job. I'm living on £60 pounds a week. I eat one meal a day. I've gotten into debt because I can't pay a lot of my bills. My situation is now severe and critical".

Asked about what she thought of the last 13 years of Labour rule, she said, "It's had disastrous consequences. It's kept the rich, rich and the poor, very poor".

Indica also spoke about what the invasion of Iraq reveals about the political system in Britain. "It's not a democracy is it? We should never have gone into Iraq. It's about the oil. I think a lot of people have been disillusioned about the Iraq War and now things are starting to come to light. No one is going to trust a government that lies to them", she noted.

"Personally I don't think the Conservatives or Labour are going to offer us anything different to what we have already seen", Indica added. She described the presence of a socialist candidate on the ballot as "something we need".

"Previously I haven't voted a lot because I don't trust any of them. I don't want to vote for a party out of ignorance. I need to look into it. But I certainly won't be voting for Labour, categorically", she explained.

At the shopping precinct in Newton Heath, Andrew, an unemployed worker from Clayton also spoke with the SEP. He has a bachelor's degree and used to work in advertising. Currently, he resides in north Manchester and does not have running water. "I'm living like I'm in a third world country", he said.

"This area needs radical social reform and change. This will not happen through the Labour Party. It can only happen through a truly left-wing government. The Labour Party doesn't represent this, nor do the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats", Andrew said.

"I remember reading on my course that Labour once represented a move away from the Whigs and Liberals in order to represent working people. And today we have a situation whereby the working people have no representation anymore. I will vote for you because I truly believe we need a left-wing government", he continued.

In Moss Side, Mary, an unemployed mother, told the

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SEP that she believes that regardless of which major party wins the elections, cuts in public services will be imposed. “It will be terrible to see the National Health Service cut. We all rely on it. I am disabled and need it for everything”, she said.

In Oxford East, where the SEP is standing David O’Sullivan, an election team spoke with Lee Loveridge, who was sacked from the Cowley BMW car plant a few weeks before Christmas in 2008.

“They called a group of thirty of us in from my section and said there’s no work. I have six kids and this was on December 4. The union messed everybody over. They said they would look after us. But when it came to the crunch, they were nowhere but trying to save their own jobs. Since then I’ve had four months of work on a fork-lift truck and four months of landscape gardening. That’s it”, he said.

“Whoever gets elected they are talking about forcing people to work who aren’t well enough, like the elderly, so they don’t have to pay benefits. I have two relatives who are too ill to work”, Loveridge added.

Tyra Hasiba, 24, expressed agreement with the SEP’s opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Hasiba, who works in retail and is also studying humanities on an access course at college, said that she had never heard of the SEP before.

“Billions have spent on war rather than welfare”, Hasiba observed. “Money should be spent on helping people in this country. War is a concern for me. I think people should be left to sort things out themselves. They didn’t achieve anything in Iraq except destruction”, she said.

“I think more should be done to help people get work. I don’t like the Labour Party, even though I voted for them last time. I’m disgusted with Tony Blair’s lies about Iraq. It’s hard to believe a thing they say. All those people who supported Blair over the war are still in power. Why should we believe them now?

“The politicians make all kinds of promises in the run-up to an election. Once they are in power, they disregard them. Before, during and after the Iraq war there were many protests around the world. But the leaders didn’t take any notice”, Hasiba noted.

Jamie Dickinson is an unemployed builder’s labourer who met the SEP outside the unemployment office. “It’s good to see a proper socialist standing”, he said.

Speaking about the economic crisis, Dickinson insisted that it “had been made by the banks”. “Gordon Brown relaxed the regulations on banking. The bankers and politicians have caused this trouble. They are trying to make the poor and less-well-off pay. But they shouldn’t have to”, he insisted.

Pensioner Ann Johnson told the SEP that none of the major parties seem interested in the difficulties facing people like herself. Local Labour MP Andrew Smith had not replied to emails about the closure of the luncheon club that she relies on at East Oxford Community Centre. Liberal Democrat Steve Goddard had come along “just so he could get his picture in the local paper”, she stated.

“For many elderly people like myself, it is the only opportunity to get a relatively cheap, hot meal and get the opportunity to meet others. If they close the club down, people will get much lonelier”, Johnson said.

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