Britain: SEP campaigns at University of Manchester

Our correspondent
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A Socialist Equality Party campaign team and members of the International Students for Social Equality have been campaigning at the University of Manchester campus on Oxford Road. The campus is in the Manchester Central constituency, where the SEP is standing its candidate Robert Skelton.

Many students and university workers have taken the SEP's election manifesto. The team spoke to students, former students, prospective students and members of staff about the policies of the SEP.

A young student from Iran said she was worried about the threats being made by the United States against Iran. "It is likely to end up with something really big happening. The US knows that it can't do the same to Iran that it did to Iraq. It would be likely to unleash a huge crisis that would put US oil supplies and other interests at risk. So I think it is holding off from doing this for the time being and trying to use its influence in other ways," she said. She said she would read the SEP manifesto and show it to her father.

Abdul from Saudi Arabia responded to the SEP call for the international unity of the working class and young people around the world. He stated his agreement with the demand to bring to trial those who had prepared and instigated the Iraq war and said he also opposed Israel's threats against Syria.

A female student said she was not being allowed to vote in Manchester where she was studying, since she was still registered at her parents' address. She said she thought "Socialist Equality" was a good thing to support.

Another student, Alan, said he thought "that the way society is run is not democracy but an oligarchy, or an elected dictatorship. Who can live on £64 per week unemployment benefit for a single person? It is degrading having to try. Where I live, it's a safe Tory seat, so who I vote for won't make much difference.

"We have got to move on completely from the whole political system—it needs to be replaced with something better. People having been saying that for decades, but it's still true."

A worker from a nearby refectory said, "My husband and I live in poverty, in spite of the fact that both of us work". She agreed with what the manifesto said about how under the Labour government the minimum wage and low pay had become the norm.

The team also spoke to with Lydia, who is employed at the university. Saying she agreed with the SEP's manifesto, she commented: "The SEP Election Manifesto hit a nerve with me—particularly what it had to say in opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the bailout of the banks. I found it very clear and concise. You don't need a degree to understand it.

"Words can be very powerful. They can have a positive and negative influence. The main political parties use words to make themselves sound knowledgeable, but this is only used to mislead. There has been a lot of dumbing down. I bought an Oxford Dictionary 1935-40 edition to look words up and follow the political debate. The language of the SEP Election Manifesto is very clear and truthful and I can see where you are coming from.

"The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are all about control of resources and driven by greed. The government is so evil and sick they think they can do whatever they like. They make out they are holier than thou, so they can meddle in other peoples countries and their affairs. Saddam Hussein had been an ally of the West. It's disgusting. I was opposed to the Iraq war from day one. The real terrorists are the British and

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American governments. I have followed developments in Palestine and am completely opposed to Zionism.

“It is very important what you say in the manifesto about uniting the working class regardless of religion and nationality. We have to become unified. Four years ago I had started to think that the immigrants were getting the jobs and houses. I had to wait 10 years for a council house and had been privately renting in the meantime, having to move four times.

“I was angry. I was confused. I knew that the jobs immigrants were doing were the ones people here were not prepared to do. It was the same for my parents, who emigrated here in the 1950s. I started to look things up on the Internet and could see the broader picture. It was like a light going on. This is divide and rule. The top one percent is using this to pit us against each other. It’s the top one percent that need bringing down.

“They target the unemployed and say they are scroungers. There are people on disability that have genuine reasons for not working. Pay these days in a lot of jobs is so low that you are no better off than being on the dole. I have been left with only £10 sometimes after paying all my expenses. You are left wondering what the point of working is.

“That was in your program about the attacks on welfare. We are in debt, bankrupt and the money is coming out of social services to prop up the banks. It’s all wrong. Our children will be stuck paying for this as well. We the people should take the country back. The top one percent has to be brought down. I am not for violence, but they have to be removed.

“I have never had any faith in the main political parties. I have only voted once in my life, that was for the Liberal Democrats. They are all only interested in lining their own pockets. People need to stop and look around at what is going on in the world.”

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