

SEP candidate Robert Skelton speaks on DM Digital TV's "Spotlight"

Our reporter
4 May 2010

Socialist Equality Party candidate for Manchester Central Robert Skelton was invited to speak on the TV programme "Spotlight" on Friday.

"Spotlight" is produced by DM Digital TV, which is available via cable and satellite in the UK, Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia. Available on the Sky platform, and broadcasting seven days a week, the channel is available in over 7.1 million UK digital satellite households and over 30 million households on the Asia platform.

In an election dominated by the media's saturation coverage for the three main parties, the decision by "Spotlight" to invite the SEP and two other smaller party candidates was an unusual and welcome one for which the channel is to be commended.

Skelton took part in a live, hour-long question and answer session hosted by "Spotlight" presenter Derek Marks. He appeared alongside two other candidates, Gayle O'Donovan (Green Party) and Mohammed Zulfikar (Respect).

Marks also asked the candidates if they could make a short statement about what their parties stood for.

O'Donovan spoke of the Green's "plans for a million new jobs in renewable technology and protecting our public services and public transport, and 100,000 of those jobs are in the north-west region".

Marks stated that looking at the Greens' manifesto, some of the policies such as protecting public services seemed "to be broadly in line with Labour Party, current government thinking".

SEP candidate Skelton then said, "Well, the name of our party really sums up what we stand for. We are a socialist party, we are an international party".

"We live under a capitalist society", he continued. "That means that all the decisions that are taken in society, everything that is made, is done at the behest of a tiny minority of people who own and control vast wealth and resources and increasingly there is massive impoverishment among the rest of the population.

"Our party seeks to replace the capitalist system with a socialist society, which is based on human need and not profit. We are saying that the three major parties—Labour, Liberal and Tory—all stand for the major banks and corporations. They represent big business.

"Our party stands for the vast majority of society, for working people, for all those who are being asked to take and pay the burden for the massive bailout of the banks that occurred last year.

"If I can just expand on one point, just to illuminate what I'm saying. The *Sunday Times* recently published their Rich List, which pointed out that the top 1,000 people increased their wealth last year by 30 percent, and it now stands at £330 billion. This is just 1,000 people and that is enough money to slash the national debt by one third.

"This is while everyone else in the country has been taking job losses, pay cuts attacks on their services, losing their homes, attacks on education, health, their welfare, pensions.

"We say this has to be rejected. The Socialist Equality Party states very clearly that working people, young people, students, mustn't make any sacrifices for this. It was not of their making. This was entirely due to the parasitic layer that runs society. They created this problem".

Marks then asked for some more detail about what the SEP proposed to do regarding the "de-industrialisation" of the UK, which he cited from its manifesto.

Skelton said, "What we explain is that in many cities around Britain, such as Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, there has been a massive process of de-industrialisation. Hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs have been lost. And this is not just a British phenomenon. It's an international phenomenon. On our website, the *World Socialist Web Site*, we have written extensively about the social problems in the United States, in Detroit, with this very same issue. Workers have seen the industries that they built and that previous generations of workers built up completely destroyed.

"So we are left today with a situation where these jobs haven't been replaced. Much of the British economy today is largely based on finances and services, and there are millions of people who face a future without jobs.

"What we call for is the expropriation of the rich and for a massive public works programme that would rebuild these cities and create thousands and hundreds of thousands of jobs and provide employment and a decent standard of living for everybody".

Marks asked what were the main issues being raised by

voters.

O'Donovan said that the financial crisis and budget deficits were issues and "We need to focus on vital public services that people need".

Skelton replied, "There is a tremendous discontent among everyone that you speak to. One of the first things that people say to us is, 'They're all the same. They stand for the same thing. I can't see any difference between them. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer'.

"And people are entirely right to draw that conclusion, because these three parties are all the same. This is why we say this election campaign as a whole is a fraud...because the agenda has already been predetermined in terms of that they insist that the population is going to have to pay for the one trillion pound bailout that was carried out over the last year.

"Now, we completely reject that, and when we propose and put forward a socialist alternative that is meeting a very good response".

Drawing attention to O'Donovan's claim that the Green Party would prioritise defending public services, Skelton said that "Gayle...pointed out that we need to defend public services. Well, it's not just the Liberals, Tories and the Labour Party that are attacking public services and laying waste to everything that people need to live, health, education, etc. In Ireland the ruling coalition there, which includes the Green Party, produced a budget last December totalling £4 billion cuts, including 300,000 workers in the public sector taking £1 billion in pay cuts.

"So we are the only party putting forward a socialist alternative, saying the rich have to be expropriated. We can no longer afford the rich. Society can no longer tolerate the burden it is being asked to carry by the super rich and the parties that represent them".

In reply O'Donovan claimed that there was "no connection" between the Irish Green Party and the party in England. "It's a completely different party", she said.

The Irish Green Party and the Green Party of England are ideological twins and are both members of the European Green Party and of The Greens-European Free Alliance in the European Parliament.

In his replies Zulfikar spoke in vague terms about the problems facing "humanity", such as war and poverty and the cuts that are being proposed in health and education. Making no analysis of the tasks posed before working people due to this big business-led agenda of all three parties, he made no significant criticism of the Labour government that has carried out these attacks.

Respect has published a "Manifesto for a Hung Parliament". In it they claim that if they won three seats of the seats they are contesting, they could then strike a deal with the Labour Party to form part of a coalition government.

They have listed, "three minimum conditions on which we would consider supporting a government"—"A massive council

house building", "The rapid withdrawal of British troops from all illegal and pointless wars" and "The radical democratisation of our constitution with a fair proportional voting system, abolition of the appointed House of Lords".

Sooner than supporting and implementing such policies, Labour would rather lose office.

Respect was founded in 2004, supposedly on the basis of opposition to the Labour Party's government to support the US-led illegal invasion of Iraq, with its leading figure being the expelled Labour MP George Galloway. Six years later Galloway merely seeks to cash in on his anti-war credentials and translate a possible electoral victory for himself into a passport back into the ranks of a Labour government.

Answering what the SEP could offer to people in Manchester, Skelton took note of the high levels of poverty in Manchester Central "produced over the last 13 years by the Labour government. In Manchester, as everywhere else, we advance and put forward an emergency works programme to rebuild these cities to provide schools, hospitals, decent paying jobs.

"This is the only way you can tackle inequality and poverty".

Marks asked each candidate what they thought about the third and final leaders' debate on the economy, which had been held the previous evening.

Skelton noted: "Just a few days before the Institute for Fiscal Studies released a report saying that none of the three main parties were telling the truth...about the extent of the cuts that they want to carry out, and that they have to carry out".

Marks concluded by asking what each candidate thought about the voting system of proportional representation. Skelton said, "Proportional Representation is a fairer system, but more fundamentally, how can you have true democracy when the top one percent own all the wealth and make all the decisions in society, and the rest of us have got no representation at all?"



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact