

Workers in Ardwick, Manchester speak of growing poverty and hardship

Our reporters

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Social inequality and the escalating cost of living has been a major issue raised with those campaigning for the Socialist Equality Party in Ardwick, Manchester, where Robert Skelton is standing as a candidate in the local elections.

Ardwick is in the top one percent of the most deprived wards in the country and an area of high unemployment and entrenched poverty.

Abdul was born in Kuwait. He said, “I have lived in other European countries and came here to be with my family. I can’t get a job here in the airline industry at any level. I have worked in cabin crew, sales and I have worked in travel agencies. Now I can’t get a job.

“London was too expensive to live and I ended up getting offered a job in Manchester, but that never worked out as I received different wages from what we agreed.

“I have tried very hard to get a job. I tried the hospital to work as a cleaner and couldn’t get that job. I have even tried in the supermarkets. I couldn’t believe the job centres when I came here. There are more security people there than there are office workers. Some of these jobs you are only getting offered 20 hours a week. How can you live? What is this system?

“It’s not only in Manchester. All the UK is like this. In some other countries I have worked in, you have to retire at 50 years old to give the young generation a chance to work. It has to be like that because if not you get young people committing suicide.

“You can see in Egypt and Yemen and Tunisia and now in Syria. It’s not so much about politics. Its mainly young people without political parties and they have come from the street because they can’t find jobs.

“And I think this will happen here, in France, in Europe. Maybe it will take a bit of time, but it will

come.

“What is £65 a week? That is what we have to live on. They give you £65 a week and give your Housing Benefit and they say, ‘Let them eat like animals’. In Arabic countries we say this is about dying slowly.

“I have a back problem and I wake up at night in great pain. I went to the doctors and they said I was fit for work. So I said, ‘well then, find me a job’.

“I waited for physiotherapy for a year. And I went and the physiotherapist never even touched me or even asked where the pain was. He gave me a few sheets of paper with some exercises on and said ‘do them’. I told him, ‘I waited one year for this’.

“In the UK the companies are free to do what they want. Look at what is happening in Iraq now. The American and British connected to the government are taking a part of the oil for free and are selling it on in other markets for profits. This is like the mafia. It is not for the benefit of the people. Iraq has plenty of oil, but the children don’t have electricity. I can show you a video of a school in Kirkuk, which is an oil city, and the children there were in a school which was ruined. They have nothing.

“I lived in Iraq following the last war and I have never voted for any of the parties there. People said to me, ‘Why don’t you vote?’ I said ‘Because they are all thieves’. I will vote for someone who I need, not these people.”

Zahid is a 29-year-old cleaner at nearby Trafford Park, with a wife and two children. He said, “The price rises were are seeing is the fault of the government, but we, the whole nation, will suffer.

“I’m struggling even though I work full time. I have to do the night shift. You have to take what work you can. And my kids are crying, asking why you are going to work at night. I try to explain to them about the

bills—council tax, electric cards and water bills. It's slave labour like it was in Roman times.

"An agency employs you for six weeks. You get £7.50 an hour and they pick up £3 from the company. So you have to prove yourself and work like a dog. You can't answer back or give lip, or the company won't take you on permanently.

"The government should get rid of these agencies. It's the biggest fraud going. The management of these agencies park their Rolls Royces outside the offices. What a scam.

"In my opinion the banks are going to repossess a lot of houses. At the same time they're sending British soldiers to die for nothing. When I went back to Pakistan recently, I was struck by the class differences. You can tell that just by what people wear. And it's getting like that here."

Layla is a support worker who cares for someone with a severe disability. She said, "My concern is for all the working class people who have to work to live and then you have all the rest getting perks. Then you have what the bankers have done and them getting bailed out. The tax payers are paying for that.

"It's unbelievable in this day and age in a rich country like England that people are struggling to get by. There are some people who don't even get a chance. There is a lot of poverty and people without food.

"In Ardwick there are new houses going up, but they are not going to be for rent. They are all for sale. It's all going to be privatised. People can't afford to buy these days. So they are enticed to buy and then they end up getting repossessed.

"My nephew went to the bank to borrow some money and then they kept saying 'borrow more'. In the end he went bankrupt.

"What you say is what people would want from their party. It's the policies I support."

Said is an unemployed worker, who lives with his wife and two children. He said, "I've lived in Ardwick since 2008 and I want to get a job but can't find one. I've been unemployed since November and this is all as a result of these cuts and the recession generally. It's getting harder and harder and affecting all our daily lives.

"The quality of life is deteriorating. Look at the prices. I went to Asda [a supermarket] and just a few

things cost me £25. This inflation is killing us. And then you get a letter from the council saying council tax was £60 and now its £85. I can't even get to drive because the insurance is thousands of pounds. I need to be able to drive to pick up my wife from work, but I can't. The bus prices have gone up too.

"Sometimes I feel that there is no opposition voice. A lot of people thought the Liberal would do well for them. I saw the debates and Nick Clegg [Liberal Democrats leader] looked like a star. Now look at what he has done in the coalition. They all used tax payers' money to bail out the banks and now we are paying for it.

"Everything has gone up—food, council tax, energy bills. And you know that what money you have coming in is already gone because the bills are on the way.

"It true what you said about Egypt. The people went out and got rid of the dictator, but the system was still in place. One of my Egyptian friends told me that there are certain roads that people can't walk down as there are government houses there, rich houses.

"What is in your manifesto is right. It's what we all talk about. What we are all suffering from. I think we really need to raise the awareness of young people. They just see Labour and the Conservatives and don't see an alternative."

A construction worker in Ardwick told a canvas team, "I agree with most of what you say. Cuts in services are not directly affecting me right now. I work for one of the biggest construction companies. But I can't see any future for my son. He is on a plastering course and the building industry is not taking on any new people.

"These wars are all about money, oil and power and who has got the biggest hand at the end of the day. I just think we need to get rid of this government and get one in that is going to look after working class people. That's all we want."



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