

Peterborough residents speak out against growing inequality

Our reporter
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Stephen Woodbridge is the Socialist Equality Party local election candidate for Bretton North, Peterborough.

Over the last days, SEP supporters have hand delivered thousands of the SEP's election manifesto to every house in the ward. On Saturday, Woodbridge and his campaign team set up stall in Bretton's main shopping centre.

Workers and youth engaged in lively discussions with the candidate on rapidly declining living standards, joblessness, and the SEP's programme for the crisis. Many had received the manifesto and stopped to discuss the party's policies.

Several of those SEP campaigners spoke with had only recently been made redundant. One described his fight to receive his redundancy payment. A former landscape gardener, who had read the manifesto, said "At British Rail and the Post Office it used to be the case of a job for life. Now you don't know if you'll have a job next week."

Campaigners spoke to Michael, who works at a local engineering factory. Peterborough was a centre of engineering, with relatively well paid and secure employment. Michael described how this has been transformed.

In Peterborough since the economic crisis began, Michael said there had been a visible "general run down of peoples' standard of living due to the lack of pay increases and the cost of living going up. For me personally, as long as the overtime is there I can manage but on a flat week it's a struggle.

"Where I work is very difficult to get a pay rise. As people retire or leave they are not replaced because I think they are trying to outsource the work. If you don't like it you can leave, that's how it works these days. When the government says 'we are all in it

together' and you see them living in big houses, with loads of money and having a lifestyle totally alien to us, it doesn't ring true."

Matt is a young warehouse worker. He spoke to Woodbridge about the difficulties of his family surviving on a yearly wage of just £12,000.

"The crisis is terrible. I've got no money and paying out more just to live. Everything is going up. They are putting bus fares up, food up, rents gone up, water, gas, electric. But my money's going down. It's getting terrible for everybody. You get people all over the place that don't get any money, who get treated terribly. People have to break the law just to get some money. It's not a way the country should be.

"The government represent the rich who say 'I've got this much money, I'm getting this at the end of the month and I don't care.' They don't represent the guys who bust their bones just to make ends meet, to pay the bills, to get themselves through and then get nothing for it.

"All the three parties are as bad as each other. They all want money that people don't have. They are making people struggle to give them what they haven't got themselves. It doesn't matter if you work or you are unemployed—you've still got no money.

"All the jobs around these days pay you the bare minimum that they can. Just a little over the minimum wage. Something like £6.10 an hour—that's the most you're going to get. They make you work 40, 50 hours a week and they still take nearly half in taxes. They all do it."

Matt supported the SEP demand for public ownership of the banks and big businesses.

"That would work a lot better. It would cover everybody, it would help everyone. It would give everyone a fair and equal opportunity, no matter how

much money you have in the bank. I don't see the point of people who have so much money and then you've got people with no money.

"Everyone should have an equal chance to get everything they need to live a decent life. There shouldn't be the 'oh you haven't got enough money, you're not getting this'. Just because someone gets £100,000 a year and someone else £12,000, why should they be treated differently? Why should you not be able to get the care you need because you haven't got the money? We should all be the same and be treated the same."

Jemime works for a housing association which also provides care and support to residents. "The council are cutting a lot of jobs", she told Woodbridge. "For example, supported housing, support workers and care workers. There are not the resources to give to people with mental health problems. Young mothers who normally have the help of a support worker are struggling to get what they need."

She described how her employer had made a lot of people redundant. "People are breaking their necks to work all hours God sends, to keep their jobs for less pay and more hours. I did a report at work on employment and it showed that in 2007 there were only 3,000 people unemployed in Peterborough but in August 2011 there were around 8,000.

"I voted Liberal Democrat in the general election, big mistake. They are similar to all the other parties—tell you what you want to hear but when it comes to the crunch they do not actually deliver. It's a case of dangling a carrot in front of your face and putting it away when they get in.

"Companies here are exploiting immigrants because they know they can pay them a lower wage for doing the same sort of job. There should be more jobs created for everyone to make it fairer. I think immigrants are scapegoated for problems. My friend works for a recruitment agency and she has had people in who are accountants but they are working in the fruit factories because the companies know they can employ them on a cheaper rate."

Jackie, a retired civil servant, explained, "The economic situation is dire. I think it's the working class who are being penalised, taxed and having the working environment changed because of the so-called downturn, whereas the moneyed people are still getting

their big bonuses, raking in the interest, keeping their foreign bank accounts. If you look at houses which are selling or not selling, the ones lower down the chain are not moving but the multi-million pound ones are still moving the same. It's the same expensive cars sales which are still moving. That says everything.

"I think everything the government has done in tax policy is all against the lower wage earners. This government represents the rich amongst us. Not even the middle class—it definitely represents the rich. There are so many millionaires in the cabinet and they are looking after their interests, the narrow band at the top.

"I've followed the unrest in Greece and we are having similar in this country. Look at the riots [last August in London]. Those youth didn't riot because they thought 'I want that television'. They rioted because they are fed up with the way things are. You start a little ruckus and it snowballs because people are all fed up. It's how the government is running the country that has caused the riots. I really feel strongly on that one. I think we need to bring this government down."



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