

SEP (UK) candidate in British council elections speaks to St. Helens residents

Our reporter
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Socialist Equality Party campaign teams have met and spoken to many residents on the High Street in St Helens town centre over the past week. The SEP is standing Danny Dickinson for the St Helens Town Centre ward in the May 3 local council elections.

On Saturday, a team set up a campaign table on the High Street and received a warm and interested response from many workers and youth.

John Holden is a photographer and actor. He said he agreed with much of the SEP's manifesto and that he would be voting for Dickinson. "I think everything in it is right. Things are getting like it is in other countries. We have seen riots overseas and here. Political tensions are bubbling under the surface, and things are going to get worse until someone does something about it", he said.

John said, "In St Helens town centre, it's so run-down that all you have are pie shops, charity shops and bars.

"I used to work for the council arts service and tried to get them to give over empty shops to do arts for the people. They had the money from regeneration but never used it. I requested information under the Freedom of Information Act, but they said they had no empty shops at the time. They used the money for something else, and I have made another request to find out what they used this for.

"As regards education, they have got all these rich people who can afford to go to university and get high-paid jobs. It's not the knowledge but the money that gets them into these positions. Whereas people from low-income families, no matter how hard they work, can get into university but not into the higher tier, as a lot of these institutions won't accept people from lower-income families because they know they can't pay. This makes

people from lower-income families think that they are not worth as much. Everyone is worth the same."

"I read in the SEP manifesto that the unions aren't for the working class any more. They haven't taken much action for a long time. Historically, people have relied on the unions to do things, but they are not for them anymore."

John also expressed his concerns about the attacks on the democratic rights imposed over the past decade by the Labour Party of Tony Blair/Gordon Brown and the present Conservative-Liberal coalition. He said, "They are seeking to curtail personal freedoms. People are oblivious to the changes that are taking place behind the scenes. No one is being alerted to this."

He told the campaign team that the coalition's plans to pass a law monitoring the Internet activity of the entire population in the UK was a grave threat and had to be opposed. "In the short term, it's going to affect people really quickly. It's going to be passed before they realise it, and it's going to be law. People will then realise they have been duped, and freedoms they thought they had are curtailed. They will start to revolt."

Lucy used to work in a women's refuge (for victims of domestic violence) and is currently looking for work. She told the SEP she considers herself a socialist.

"At the moment I can't get a job. Capitalism is in crisis, and we're feeling the butt end of it. I get fed up with the way they misuse the resources of this planet."

"The unions are not here for us—they never have been. They negotiate on behalf of the capitalists to keep themselves in their mansions."

She also told the team about her opposition to religion being taught in schools. "Religion should be separated from the schools. I think it should be a punishable offence for any bourgeois to teach small children these lies about the 'invisible man' god. That's where it [the capitalist system] starts".

Lucy said she had read the Marxist classic, *The of the Family, Private Property, and the State* by [Friedrich] Engels, and after she finished it, “I could not sleep. It was so simple. It was like a thunderbolt hitting you. All the questions I had in my life were just answered in that book.

“I am worried about the future. If the workers don’t rise and take control, I think we’re going to see more wars, famine. The planet is endangered, and so is our species.”

She wished the SEP success in St Helens, stating, “I think it’s wonderful that I’ve bumped into socialists in our town—fighting on behalf of the working class.”

Young people have also visited the SEP stall to speak to the campaign team.

Dave and **Sophie** are a young unemployed couple who described their difficult conditions. They are currently living in accommodation supplied by the YMCA youth charity.

Sophie said, “I’ve got two months to get a place or the YMCA will chuck me out because I’m pregnant. They are putting me under unnecessary stress which anyone could do without.”

Dave said, “We are living in the YMCA at the moment because of what the government’s doing, like cutting benefits. We are finding it difficult to get on with things. We have a baby on the way, and this is making things difficult. We need someone who will help us.

“We pay £70 a fortnight for the cleaning, electric, gas, water and a room. The facilities aren’t that great, and you get no help unless you ask for it. The bed is so bad you can feel the springs through it. It’s like living in a third-world country, struggling to keep its head above water.

“They are also making it harder to find jobs and trying to force people to work on such a low wage, because they are getting better pay on benefits. I worked for a shoe company for four Sundays and got £60 for one month. Yes, that was the whole pay! If the government offered me any less, I would tell them where to stick it.

“I’ve been out of work for three years and just want a job that pays well so I can support my family. They are taking money off us to put back into the banks and to fund wars.

“It was on the news the other day that we are going into another depression. Having a baby costs a lot of money—we are in an impossible situation. They are making cuts and dragging everybody back. Me, Sophie and our child could end up on the streets.”

Dave had recently watched a BBC programme about last summer’s UK riots. “I thought—you idiots. This is

going to carry on as long as the cuts are going on because things are getting worse and people are getting more wound up by it. All the government focus on is money.

“Just because we’re a different class, doesn’t mean we should be so unequal. I saw the other day an MP had paid thousands for a duck pond at the government’s expense. The government are happy to sit on their pile of money while we suffer.”

He said he supported the SEP and that he “would really like to help with your campaign as it’s something worth fighting for.”

Claire Mills and her daughter **Andrea** spoke to the campaign team. Claire is a mother of four children, one of whom has now finished school but is unable to find a permanent job.

Claire told the team about her concerns. “I am deeply concerned that my children won’t get educated to a standard that they should have. With all these cuts and the university fees, it will be just the rich whose sons and daughters get to go to university.”

Andrea, Claire’s oldest daughter, spoke about her frustrations at being given one part-time job after another. “When you are on one of these low-pay employment schemes, you are treated really badly and the pay is sad. I have had to choose to walk to work or buy lunch.”

She said that being able to buy decent clothes and “other normal things” a teenage girl should have are “taboo” for her. “I know my mum can’t afford to help me out. She is backed against the wall. I just want to have some sort of life.”



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