

St. Helens, UK: Election meeting discusses Jerry White's presidential campaign

Robert Stevens
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Danny Dickinson, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for the St. Helens Town Centre ward, spoke at his latest campaign meeting in the town on Wednesday evening. The meeting was attended by a number of workers from St. Helens and the nearby city of Liverpool.

Dickinson explained that the sister party of the SEP in the United States, the Socialist Equality Party, was standing lifelong socialist Jerry White as its candidate in the presidential election. The meeting opened with a showing of a recent studio interview with Jerry White conducted by Russia Today (RT), a global news channel broadcasting from Moscow and Washington studios.

After the presentation a lively discussion about the programme and policies of the SEP took place.

Following the meeting Alan Stephenson, a worker who lives in St. Helens, spoke to a WSWs reporter about his support for Dickinson's campaign and the SEP. Stephenson met the SEP recently at one of the campaign stalls in the town centre.

Stephenson said, "I was very impressed with what Danny said. I see him as a true representative of working class interests. He's a man who sees things from the working class perspective. He is not in the pocket of any businessman. He is a true socialist, which is a rare thing in today's times. He is a man who clearly sees the only way forward as socialism and he is correct in that. More and more working class people, such as myself, see that the only way forward is the way that the Socialist Equality Party is proposing that we go. And that is to fight for working class interests."

Stephenson was enthused by hearing Jerry White's interview. "I think he is a great orator. That's my first impression. If anyone should be in the White House, it's Jerry White. He clearly doesn't represent the narrow interest of the 0.1 percent, the elite, the rich, super-rich. In

fact, he talked about all the issues the masses of people are concerned with like health, education, jobs. And he wasn't just talking about that we need jobs, but that we need democratic control of these workplaces, which is what shook me.

"I was very impressed and I can't overemphasise that fact. He was extremely articulate. There was no hesitation in his replies to the interviewer. He knew his own mind and that mind is clearly focused on a socialist objective."

Stephenson told the WSWs that he had bought the pamphlet, *Marxism and the Trade Unions*, a lecture by David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, during the campaign.

He said of the pamphlet, "I understood the points before I read it, but it clarified it all for me. The book explains that the national question and the trade unions are intricately linked. It explains that the trade unions are there to bargain with the capitalists, on behalf of the capitalists, for the rate at which the workers are going to be exploited. They are not there to fight for the workers; they are there to control and mitigate any militancy.

"David North linked that to the national question eloquently. He explained that not only do the unions fight for the capitalists, but they fight for them within a particular nation state. So they will fight for British capitalism or American capitalism and in doing so it is the complete antitheses of internationalism, which is what socialism is about. Socialism and nationalism don't mix, as we know. Nationalism negates socialism.

"The pamphlet made it very clear that the unions are part of the capitalist system and part of capitalist society. And capitalist societies are based on nation states and nation states are all about narrow, national, capitalist interests.

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"Like Danny so eloquently put it tonight, it's only rank-and-file committees that will fight. Trade union bureaucrats will not encourage workers to fight. They will encourage workers to negotiate away any gains they've gained. They'll encourage workers to surrender. They may try to dress it up, but it'll be surrender in one form or another. They either sell out by going along with voluntary redundancy, or they will cut the number of jobs or agree to keep wages but lose pensions. They'll sell out somehow and dress up a very bitter pill with some sugar."

Stephenson said Jerry White made important points about how the corporate elite control US politics through their representatives in the Democratic and Republican parties.

"It evident that the corporate backers of the Democrats and Republicans have used this financial crisis as an excuse to cut workers' gains, welfare and wages and conditions", he said, "And they've transferred that finance to prop up those same culprits who caused the financial crisis in the first place—the large banks and corporations. Danny was explaining tonight that the big auto companies in the States were being bailed out by the same corrupt deception. I think the big auto companies were already in financial dire straits, but they've used it as an opportunity to crawl out of bankruptcy and be given billions by the US government. And the US state got those billions by cutting welfare that millions of working class Americans depend on. So corporate America has gained at the expense of 200 million working class Americans."

Speaking about the deepening austerity measures being imposed in Britain, Stephenson said, "It's now increasingly difficult to get the dole [unemployment benefit] if you're made redundant. Housing Benefit has been cut and they are talking about denying under-25s any Housing Benefit. That is going to force people not only back to their parents, but those with no parents and no support onto the streets. It's going to increase homelessness."

On the threatened privatisation of the National Health Service, Stephenson said, "The NHS was a security blanket, one that kept people alive. With the Conservative plans to privatise the NHS, it means people will die. You won't see it in a dramatic fashion where there is dying in the streets, but ill people will die in their beds at home because they won't be admitted to hospital when they should be. Prescription charges will deny people

medicines that keep them alive. Routine operations that we take for granted will be denied, and they will only be offered on a private basis, on a paying basis. It will be: if you don't have the money, you don't get it.

"They are making no secret of it. They are attacking working class gains in the workplace, in the NHS, education. I was heartened by the students fighting back, even though it was seemingly a bit of a flash in the pan. They did get on the streets to fight against the getting rid of the Education Maintenance Allowance and the increasing of student fees. Perhaps they lacked direction and didn't carry it through. But they showed the will to fight and it's encouraging because they've got the energy. We have to support them, because if we do they'll support us in return because we're all in the same fight together."

Stephenson said he was opposed to the Labour Party and its capitalist programme: "The Labour Party doesn't even make a show of siding with working class people any more. They don't even use the term working class. They come up with these phrases like 'hard working families, the squeezed middle'. These are nonsense, meaningless terms.

"I read that if a Labour Party member even says the word 'socialism' they get shouted down. To me it's delusional if people think you can get anywhere with and within the Labour Party with a socialist perspective. Because as Danny Dickinson and Jerry White pointed out, the perspective that will service the working class—and is in the interest of the working class—is a socialist perspective and socialist politics. And anything else is just a dead end."

Stephenson said he would like to assist in the SEP's campaign in St. Helens and find out more about the party.



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