

UK: SEP candidate talks to students in St. Helens

Our reporters
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Socialist Equality Party campaign teams at St. Helens College and in the town centre have spoken to a number of students and workers about the party's programme. The SEP is standing Danny Dickinson for the St. Helens Town Centre ward in the May 3 local elections.

Patsy and Sarah are sisters who live in St. Helens. They are both students.

Patsy is at university and said, "I get £1,200 every three months to live on from student finance, from the government. I'm doing a foundation course for two years. I am paying £4,000 a year for my degree.

"I know people who have got degrees and they are working in shops. And they still have to pay off all their debts."

Sarah, who is at St. Helens College, said, "I know people who want to go to college but they can't get in. They won't accept them. People at my college have just been made redundant. The attendance officers who've been there for years have gone.

"It's disgusting. It's really difficult to get jobs these days. It's a waste of time going to university, isn't it?"

Sarah was opposed to the bankers continually getting richer at the expense of the majority of the population. "All these rich people should just start sharing. They've got all this money that they are sitting on at home. They've got people working for them, and they're still making all this money."

Emma is studying Forensic Science. "The situation today is horrible," she said. "We have nothing to focus on and to work for, because we are just left out. Nobody wants to help us. It's the money that's not being put into communities to help us, to inspire us to work. There's nothing, just nothing. That's what I feel".

Emma said that she supported none of the major

parties, Conservative, Liberal or Labour. "They say it's nothing to do with class", she said, "but it has everything to do with class. Even the tax placed on pasties. When was the last time they ever bought a pasty? It's not affecting any of them, it's just us."

Ongoing cuts in career planning services were preventing young people from being able to have access to decent jobs in the area. "Jobs are going in Connections [an employment agency] that help young people get into college and apprenticeships. They are getting sacked. We have to pay for bus passes now, and they are £40. That's a lot when we used to get them for free. I feel the whole thing will get worse."

Jonathan is a student at St. Helens College. He said he was on a level two course, which would not qualify him for a decent job. He told the team he wanted to "top-up" his qualifications, but was refused further grants and told to get a part-time job to fund his study. "The government has decided there is no more funding after level two. This is my first course, so it wouldn't qualify me for a job other than a minimum-wage one."

Ellen is the mother of a disabled child and was angry that workers are being forced to take low-paid jobs "just to support our kids while at college". She was opposed to a situation in which the only jobs available for workers were low-paid. "I think we should be funded. I want to be able to qualify and go into a school as a trained learning mentor. But it's not going to be like that. It will mean going back to part-time jobs," she said.

As with Jonathan, she also faced the removal of her funding after finishing studying at level two. A further cut in her income is to take place in October, as her Income Support payments will be stopped. Ellen said she has been told she will then have to get a job, as the rules state that when your youngest child reaches the

age of five, you can no longer claim.

Sue explained, “Me and my partner, who is soon to be my husband, have got five children. We both work, although my partner has been laid off for four weeks. We’ve received no money whatsoever off the government yet. Even when we are both working, we are living way beyond our means. We’ve got more going out than we’ve got coming in. We’ve had an eviction order on the house recently. The council actually wanted us out even though we’ve got five children.”

Sue said the council had suspended the eviction order as long as the couple pay £100 a week in rent. They have to pay that amount as well as Council Tax, even though she only works part-time for 15 hours a week.

Even when her husband was working full-time, the family struggled to stay afloat financially: “When you think of the amount of money that is coming in, you think it’s a lot. But it’s not when you’ve paid your rent, your Council Tax, your bills. You don’t get much help off the government at all. I get Child Benefit and Working Tax Credit, but it’s just not enough.”

John is an unemployed worker and said he was opposed to all three parliamentary parties. Asked about what he thought of the Labour Party, he said, “They think they can do anything they want and hide things from us.” He added, “The cuts are affecting people in every shape and form. They are taking the money for themselves out of our pockets. Let the people decide and not this government.”

Opposed to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, John told the team, “All the money that has gone over there should have been used for training schemes for people wanting work.”



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