

Socialist Equality Party Public Meetings

UK workers and young people discuss Syria and the threat of war

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth for Socialist Equality have held a series of meetings under the heading, “Hands off Syria.”

The western powers—led by the US, Britain, and France—have been actively intervening in Syria, financing, arming and training oppositionists to the Assad regime, many of whom are Islamic extremists allied to Al Qaeda. Their aim has been to encourage a bloody sectarian war so as to overthrow Bashar al-Assad and install a more pliant administration as part of their offensive against Iran, and China and Russia more broadly.

When that was seen to be failing due to lack of domestic support for the Islamist-dominated opposition, the imperialist powers determined on another provocation—this time utilising a chemical weapons explosion in Damascus on August 21 as the *casus belli* for direct western military intervention.

But with only days to go before the intervention, their scheming ran afoul of massive popular opposition—first expressed in the defeat of a war resolution by the British parliament on August 29. As the scale of public hostility became clear, the Obama administration was forced to retreat, seizing on a Russian proposal for Syrian chemical weapon disarmament as a new means of pressing its agenda.

The SEP/IYSSE meetings took place as this scenario unfolded. The overwhelming majority of a mainly young audience were scathing of the humanitarian pretext being used for war. Most had no confidence that war had been stopped, merely postponed.

A number of young female college students attended the meeting in London.

Juliet said, “I have only just got a computer. I saw the *World Socialist Web Site* and decided to travel up to the meeting tonight. I want to thank you for the awareness in this meeting. I think the students and youth must get involved. I think the masses outweigh the elite and have to show their strength.

“I am concerned about a Third World War and the mass destruction that would happen. It’s unbearable to sit at home and do nothing. That’s why I think reading and education is so important. We all have to do that.

“[Former Labour Prime Minister] Tony Blair should be held to account for war-mongering, for going against the people and causing the loss of so many lives.

“The thing I understood from the meeting was the way the attack on Syria was planned many years ago. I can now see how the unrest has developed and the plot behind it.”

Laura explained, “We heard about the meeting from a flyer outside

our college at Westminster Kingsway. This was a really fantastic, informative meeting. I already believed in socialism myself and knew some things, but this meeting has expanded on my knowledge.

“My mum has been quite left-wing and I have been using the internet to do some research and find out more about Marxism. My friends have been left too and I thought, ‘Hang on, I have to do something too.’ To understand why the rich, the bourgeoisie are too rich and the poor too poor and how we can try to get more equality. That’s why I’m really interested.

“The meeting really showed me the connection between capitalism and imperialism.”

Dakota said, “Before I came to the meeting I thought it was inevitable, we couldn’t do anything about what is going on and would lose the fight. But as soon as the speaker started to explain, it began to change my perspective. The media portrays things completely different to what was said here. Your party really cares about equality and ordinary people. The government doesn’t. Government is all about money and the rich.

“What is portrayed on TV is not the truth. All we hear is Syria did the chemical attack and we are going to war. Also there are lots of bad things going on around the world, but we don’t get to hear about them because it doesn’t economically benefit the rich.

“The government are corrupt—from the individual policeman, up to the governments of different countries. I don’t look at the government as my government. *We* have to be the government and start acting as one, otherwise there is a possible World War Three.

“What was said tonight is all new to me. But it was really fascinating. There was nothing I heard that I disagree with.

“I think half of the British population should have been here. But the media is disillusioning people. They do not tell people what is really going on. They do not really know what the Arab Spring was. We have to do our part and spread it around.”

At the Bradford public meeting, the WSWS spoke to Joseph, 17-year-old and currently at school:

“My dad supports the *World Socialist Web Site* and reads it every day. I used to read it occasionally about two years ago and then I went off it for a while. But the crisis in Syria has made me take up reading it again and now it is an important part of my daily life.

“I really like Bill Vann’s articles. I can actually understand them. They are so clear and compelling. But the Trotsky Archive is beyond me at the moment.

“I enjoyed the article by David North and Alex Lantier on August 28 on ‘Why the US is waging war on Syria.’ I realise that Obama

doesn't represent the working class, which he claimed to before he was elected, with his 'Campaign for Change.'"

Ash Khan is a young filmmaker who is currently trying to raise finance to make a film about the situation in Gaza seen through the eyes of an Israeli girl and a Palestinian boy:

"What is happening in Syria is a case of America taking over yet another weaker country. It's not about religion, it's about human rights. It's about the strong oppressing the weak.

"Last year I was part of a convoy to Gaza organised by Viva Palestina. We were taking humanitarian aid, medical aid, and clothes donated by people all over the UK. The convoy passed through Damascus and while there picked up £2 million of medical equipment donated by the people of Syria.

"I spoke to a Syrian lady called Hadiya, who was a member of the convoy. She said that the western media was portraying a completely one-sided view of the events in the civil war. She believed that the Syrian people should be left to sort out the situation in their own country.

"The very existence of the country and its people is being threatened over the claim that Assad has used chemical weapons. How come this rule doesn't apply to Israel, a country that has used white phosphorus on Palestinian civilians? This is yet another case of the use of double standards by the West. Obama and the American government don't care about the Syrian people. All they care about is world domination.

"I was interviewed last November on the Birmingham Midland Masala Radio, and I compared what is happening to the Palestinian people in Gaza with what happened to the black people in the US. When blacks fought against oppression they were treated as criminals. It's the same situation in Gaza. They are oppressed like the blacks were oppressed in America years ago. Rosa Parks said she did not want to give up her seat on the bus and this was portrayed as a crime. When the Palestinians defend themselves the US portray them as criminals.

"That is what the US is doing in Syria."

Beverly attended the Manchester meeting: "The US and Britain think they can rule the world and make everyone do what they want. One minute they are friends with a dictator like Saddam Hussein and then the next minute they are against him. They think they are puppeteers and can manipulate everyone behind the scenes.

"They said Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (WMD), but I knew it was lies. I fell out with my best friend because she was taken in and said they did have WMDs. Israel has had WMDs including nuclear missiles for a long time, but that seems to be okay because they are best mates with the US.

"I don't believe anything in the media other than the day and the date. I don't watch the news on television anymore because it's all lies.

"The other thing is the way they try to get people to go against Muslims and against each other. They are always going on about Al Qaeda and terrorism and blaming Muslims. It's the same as they did to make people hate the Irish in the 1970s. There are loads of people in prison for things they haven't done—just like the Birmingham Six were.

"The Labour Party was supposed to be against war, but they were the ones who went to war in Afghanistan and Iraq. They are just the same as the ConDems [Conservatives and Liberal Democrats]. I call them that because they conned everybody.

"When I go to the Job Centre I get looked down on. I get told, 'You are getting free money.' They write letters to me making threats I will

lose my benefits. I have brought up five children, and the three that are old enough are going out to work. Bringing up children is the hardest job in the world, but you don't get paid and you don't get respect for doing it.

"The sons and daughters of the rich don't go off to war and get killed, only the poor."

Ahmed, a British-born student of Sudanese origin said, "I liked the talk. It was informative, clear and concise, with no wasted words. It gave you a historical perspective on the conflict in Syria.

"I have been to a few meetings about Syria, at the Manchester Metropolitan University and the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. But they missed the key points. The meeting at SOAS was before the true character of the Syrian opposition became clear. They were supporting it as a popular uprising against Assad and calling for regime change.

"I can see what you are saying, that there is no short term fix to the crisis in Syria, only a long term solution, a political solution."

Billy explained, "I was delighted by the young man who spoke. His interpretation and delivery touched similar thoughts in my own mind. Also the amount of young people at the meeting impressed me.

"I have never affiliated to a political party, but I am aware. I make myself aware of how much I despise capitalism. This hate for capitalism has been with me since I was a young man. I started work at 15, and I know the consequences of the oppression of the working class. I know it doesn't matter where you go in the world; people are wonderful regardless of race, etc. Wherever you go the working class is oppressed. I am 64 now and not in work due to no jobs and capitalism having no need for my trade. There must be a better life for the working class."

Joe is an art student who attended the meeting in Liverpool: "I appreciated the report and the discussion afterwards. I don't believe what the media say on subjects like this; they only tell you what they want. The stakes are high in Syria. Russia has a port there, and America wants to move in and take over.

"Syria was central to the development of civilization. It's the opposite of what the racists like the British National Party say. Culture developed first in the Middle East and spread out from there.

"There is a massive humanitarian disaster taking place in Syria, but there aren't any immediate solutions. I understood that from attending the meeting. Capitalism is destroying culture rather than creating it. I am studying art, so it worries me that the system undermines what art is trying to achieve."

Hamed is from Afghanistan and a Civil Engineering student: "I was on the internet looking for all reports from a socialist view on Syria. I found the *World Socialist Web Site* and the details of the meeting.

"Syria is being devastated and more devastation will be caused by an invasion. I am from Afghanistan, and my country was destroyed during the wars.

"I hope there will be a return to socialism and students and workers will get together like in the Russian revolution—workers, students, and peasants join together—these are people for socialism."



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