

SEP holds first European election meeting in North West England constituency

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The Socialist Equality Party has held the first of its weekly meetings in the North West England constituency for the elections to the European Parliament, held in the UK on May 22 (May 25 elsewhere in Europe).

Together with the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party, PSG) in Germany, they are seeking to unite working people against the capitalist European Union and its policies of war and austerity in the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe. Their joint manifesto can be read here .

The meeting, which is held every Wednesday in Manchester's Friends Meeting House, was attended by a number of workers and youth who had met the SEP for the first time since the campaign was launched on April 1.

SEP candidate Lucy Warren was first to speak and concentrated her remarks on the life young people face today. She said that a political and social system unable to offer the generation a better future than their parents and grandparents is "one that has lost any claim to historical legitimacy."

Warren proceeded to show that capitalism has lost any such claim. The young generation, she explained, "has become a deliberate target for attack and told to accept a future without decent jobs, health or education, all in order to restructure the labour market and drive up exploitation."

The first actions of the coalition government in Britain were to abolish the Educational Maintenance Allowance for poorer youth, triple university tuition fees and implement huge cuts in funding. Once again, "a good education is being turned into the exclusive privilege of the rich," the speaker declared.

Warren explained how hundreds of thousands of working-class youth are unemployed, underemployed or forced to work for poverty wages on workfare schemes and subject to zero-hour contracts. Even those who have graduated are no longer guaranteed a decent living. Many

are saddled with tuition debts, earn far below once-expected starting salaries or work for next to nothing on internships. A recent poll found 1 in 10 youth feel they have "nothing to live for," she added.

Warren also drew attention to the dire situation facing youth across Europe. Unemployment of 63 percent in Greece and 56 percent in Spain has led to a mass exodus. The turn to militarism and war "means youth face a far worse fate—being dragooned into the service of imperialism as cannon fodder."

Warren ended by saying "the only way forward for young people is to unite internationally under a socialist perspective, learn the lessons of the Russian Revolution, the rise of Stalinism and the struggle waged by Leon Trotsky to found the Fourth International as the World Party of Socialist Revolution."

SEP National Secretary Chris Marsden, who heads the party slate in the North West, said that the European sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International were participating in the elections "to advance ourselves as the leadership of the working class."

From this standpoint, Marsden addressed the significance of the demands raised in the election manifesto—the United Socialist States of Europe, an end to militarism and war, the defence of democratic rights and redistribution of the nation's wealth. He drew attention to the "serious, grave situation in Ukraine, which has brought to an end all the claims that the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 represented the end of history and the final triumph of universal liberal democracy."

Marsden cautioned that "a party is not just a collection of slogans, however correct they may be. But, as Trotsky said, it is the programme that builds the party."

"Parties are built over years and are rooted in definite class interests. It is not enough for a party to say it represents the working class. It has to be proven in an historical struggle against organisations and policies

antithetical to the interests of the working class.”

“Our programme,” Marsden concluded, “has stood the test of time. We ask you not just to vote for us but to join and help build the SEP.”

This was followed by a lively and extensive question-and-answer session, over the current level of political consciousness in the working class and the tactics needed to mobilise the working class for struggle.

Marsden explained that tactics were secondary to strategy. Only a socialist perspective and programme expressed the interests of the working class. But the working class has had a bitter experience with parties claiming to stand in their interests. Millions of workers built the Labour Party in Britain to fight for workers’ interests. This was a reformist party, and along with other social democratic parties voted in 1914 not to unite the working class internationally, but support their own ruling class and kill other workers.

The working class in Russia took power in 1917, providing an inspiration to workers all over the world. But it was isolated due to the betrayals of the revolutionary movements in Europe after World War I by social democracy. Invaded by 13 imperialist armies, the Soviet Union existed as a siege economy with massive shortages.

It was under these conditions that a bureaucracy arose to manage and distribute the scarce resources, enriching itself in the process. This bureaucracy, headed by Stalin, became deeply conservative, rejecting the notion of international socialism in favour of the anti-Marxist notion of “building socialism in one country”. It betrayed the international workers’ uprisings in order to preserve its own rule at home. It turned against all those who had had any connection with 1917 and socialist traditions, organising frame-up trials, executing the leaders of the October revolution and the most politically conscious leaders and workers and their families, and sending millions to the gulags. Finally, as Leon Trotsky, the founder of the Fourth International had warned, it restored capitalism, paving the way for the current catastrophe.

“Our party was built by Trotsky, who opposed the consolidation of the bureaucracy under Stalin in the Soviet Union,” Marsden said. For this he was viciously persecuted, as were all those who remained true to their socialist principles. Trotsky himself was murdered by Stalin’s hired assassin in Mexico in 1940.

It was only possible to understand the current situation by drawing the lessons of this history, Marsden continued. “There is enormous social anger. People do want to fight back but they need a party, a new kind of party that has a

demonstrable record of fighting on a principled basis for socialism.” That is the importance of the SEP/PSG election campaign, he said.

On the question of changing consciousness, the speakers pointed to the key role of the *World Socialist Web Site*. There is no question that social conditions will generate mass movements and revolutionary struggles, they explained, but the critical issue is to give that movement a programme and political direction.

“This is a big task,” Marsden said. “It is difficult and there is no easy way round it. But when the working class is organised politically in a party, it will have influence and change the world.”

An African worker asked about the relationship of the European Union to Africa. Marsden said that the relationship was fundamentally exploitative, both during the colonial era and after so-called independence, when the national bourgeoisie were unable to establish any genuine independence or end exploitation and oppression. Wherever the national bourgeoisie came to power, the same essential relationships—capitalist relations—continued, with a thin layer creaming off a layer of the profits from the super-exploitation of the working class as agents for the transnational corporations and the banks.

This is so evident in South Africa, where the ANC is answerable to Britain, the US, the big corporations and banks. Its relationship to the working class is one of hostility and exploitation. The task, therefore, is to unite the European and African working class, and build the Socialist Equality Party in every African country.



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