

European Elections: SEP candidate Robert Skelton speaks at candidates meeting

Our reporters
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On May 16, Robert Skelton, Socialist Equality Party (SEP) candidate for North West England spoke to an audience of 45 at a hustings in the rural east Cheshire town of Alsager.

Skelton spoke alongside candidates from the Green Party, Liberal Democrats, Pirate Party, UK Independence Party (UKIP), English Democrats, Independence from Europe and the fascist British National Party (BNP). The Labour Party, Conservative Party and No2EU candidates did not turn up

Skelton's remarks were in sharp contrast to the extreme right-wing, anti-immigrant stance of the four right-wing candidates and of the pro-European Union (EU) stance of the Liberal Democrats, Greens and the Pirate Party (PP) candidates.

Despite the Pirate Party's anti-establishment posture, their candidate declared himself neither "left nor right" but critically supported the European Union. The party's North West election communication declares, "We want to be a part of a European Union that can compete with big world powers like the US, China, and Russia."

In his opening presentation, Skelton said the SEP in Britain are in a "joint campaign with our sister party in Germany, the Partei fu?r Soziale Gleichheit. We are the only parties opposing war and austerity.

"Events in Ukraine are an urgent warning. The US and its European allies are working with fascists to provoke civil war and a confrontation with Russia. One hundred years since the First World War, and 75 years since the Second World War, Europe's rulers threaten yet another, more terrible bloodbath.

"They must be stopped," said Skelton, stating that the SEP was for turning "the European election into a referendum against war!"

Skelton then addressed the presence of BNP leader

Nick Griffin, who is presently a Member of the European Parliament. "We are the only party which opposes the far right without any trace of hypocrisy," he said. "The other parties' opposition to the BNP is a fraud. They all advocate nationalism and put forward various forms of anti-immigrant rhetoric."

Skelton said all the signs were that the vote for the BNP would collapse because "UKIP is the new favoured means for the ruling elite to encourage the growth of right-wing reaction. UKIP is being brought into mainstream politics because it spreads the same type of nationalism and scapegoats immigrants but without the overt fascist colouration of the BNP."

Skelton asserted "Against the capitalist European Union, we stand for workers' rule across the continent. We fight for socialism, for the unity of the working class globally."

The hustings agenda asked candidates to explain their policies regarding agricultural land, energy, immigration and "in/out of Europe".

On agriculture, Skelton explained "We support small farmers who are threatened with being wiped out by the deepening capitalist crisis. These businesses are in desperate need of reliable sources of credit and relief from the unfair monopolistic practices of the large corporations... We live in a mass society. There are a number of industries critical to the basic functioning of society—including telecommunications, agriculture, education, health care and transportation. These must also be subject to public ownership and democratic control. We would take over the massive agribusinesses and they would be run democratically in the interests of society."

Skelton argued that, as part of a socialist programme, experts should be gathered to develop an energy policy based on human need. "This is the necessary first step

in the implementation of a rational global plan for the production of energy, while protecting the environment, including a massive social investment in alternative forms of energy and public transportation.

“We oppose the uncontrolled application of fracking by private corporations whose sole aim is the maximization of profits at any cost. The fracking disaster really demonstrates the case for socialist planning”, said Skelton.

On immigration, the Greens and PP responded to the xenophobia from the right-wing parties by defending the EU. Under conditions in which the EU had just supported the fascist-led coup in Ukraine, the Green candidate stated that nationalism had led Europe to two world wars and that the EU “was formed to make sure that policies and fears of that nature never took power again”.

Skelton explained “the Green Party correctly said that immigration wasn’t the problem, but did not say that the problem was the existence of the capitalist system and all of its terrible consequences. We completely reject the scapegoating of immigrants, who are being blamed for the social crisis created by capitalism. We are in favour of anyone being able to live wherever they want, anywhere in the world.”

“The problem” is not “immigration,” he said. The real problem Skelton explained is “that capitalism systematically impoverishes billions of people all over the world.”

Skelton asked the audience, “Who are the real parasites in society? It’s the super-rich. After the 2008 global financial crash the Labour Party began a bailout of the bankers. This involved more than £1 trillion pounds being looted from the public purse and handed over to the billionaires who created the crisis in the first place, with no discussion at all.

“This was seamlessly carried on by this government with the money now being clawed back through more than £150 billion in austerity cuts. £20 billion is being taken from the National Health Service budget and now they are talking about making this £30 billion.”

It is capitalism and endless wars in search of resources and profits that has created “massive dislocation and movements of peoples, including refugees and asylum seekers. These people just want a decent life and a future for their families and they have become convenient scapegoats.

“We stand against every form of anti-immigrant chauvinism, racism and nationalism, including the advocacy of separatism” in Scotland and across the continent” because it sows divisions “between workers at a time when united struggle against the common enemy is essential.”

Due to time, the final question “in/out of Europe” was not taken.

Skelton explained to audience members afterwards, “For us the question is to explain what the class nature of the EU is and why it must be opposed.”

He cited a high ranking Greek European Commissioner, Maria Damanaki, who stated in 2013 that the EU strategy, “over the past year-and-a-half or two has been to reduce the labour costs in all European countries in order to improve the competitiveness of European companies over their rivals from Eastern Europe and Asia.

“That’s straight from the horse’s mouth,” he added, explaining that Damanaki is a member of the PASOK party in Greece, who began mass austerity in that country leading to a terrible social decline for millions.

Skelton concluded that it meant “cuts in workers’ wages and conditions in all countries in a never-ending race to the bottom. This is why the EU backs the regime in Ukraine. In exchange for a so-called bailout loan the Ukraine regime is going to impose even worse austerity than in Greece and this is in a country where the average wage is already just 79 cents an hour. And that will be the new benchmark.... We do not advocate the reform of capitalism, but the struggle for its overthrow. Our aim is to unite working people throughout Europe in the struggle for a socialist society.”



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