

UK SEP National Secretary interviewed on BBC Daily Politics

Our reporter
4 June 2014

On Monday Chris Marsden, the National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the UK, was interviewed on the BBC 2's *Daily Politics* show.

The interview, with journalist Jo Coburn, was in response to the SEP's official complaint that a previous May 21 interview with Marsden on the show ended with interviewer Giles Dilnot, "suggesting that the SEP is a violent organisation that would kill journalists." (See, "SEP European election candidate Chris Marsden interviewed on BBC 2's Daily Politics")

Dilnot said at the conclusion of that interview, "Please tell me I am not first up against the wall when it comes". He then turned away from Marsden who replied, "Of course not," before the cameras faded.

The BBC put an edited version of that interview on its web site on May 23, as part of the BBC's "European elections: Party-by-party guide" with Dilnot's remarks about being "first up against the wall" removed.

In his complaint, Marsden demanded a retraction from the BBC "and a right to reply to this despicable insinuation."

Introducing Marsden in the *Daily Politics* studio, Coburn showed the clip of Dilnot interviewing Marsden, which included the offending comment.

Coburn asked Marsden, "Tell us why you're upset by that interview."

Marsden replied, "I thought the crack at the end was uncalled for and demonstrated bias and it trivialised something which is quite serious. If you consider at the moment you have a situation in which the government and significant figures within the government are calling for [*Guardian* editor] Alan Rusbridger to be prosecuted for publishing material from Edward Snowden, and then it is suggested that socialists are in favour of the persecution of journalists and that is

obviously false."

Coburn interjected, "But that was a joke wasn't it at the end? It was the end of the interview."

Marsden responded, "Of course it's a joke. There was a lot of schoolboy humour in the interview, but the point about it is that I believe that your viewers deserve better. After all these are important elections under conditions in which many, many millions of people are struggling to get by. You've got a 12 percent decline in people's living standards. You've got austerity measures being imposed across Europe... You have a situation..."

Coburn interrupted Marsden saying, "Sure. But how many other TV interviews did you have?"

Marsden informed her that this had been his only TV interview during the election and that he had also done some radio interviews.

Coburn responded, "So the programme does take it seriously and we do interview the smaller parties. I'm just trying to find out whether you really did take offence at that time or whether it was something that came afterwards, that you thought was belittling the party in some way?"

Marsden replied, "I thought immediately it was belittling," and explained that he was aware that the reference was from the 1970s BBC sitcom *Citizen Smith*.

He explained, "The point about it is that socialism, the socialism that we believe in, is a democratic, egalitarian, mass movement of the working class; that is not about suppressing journalists or carrying out all the crimes of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. We've spent decades and decades fighting against all that and I disagree with being associated with it."

"It's one thing to interview small parties," Marsden

said, but “what is the purpose of this? We are fighting to represent the working class under conditions in which no one is seeking to represent the working class. You have parties that all cuddle up to big business and support austerity.”

Coburn responded, “Well lots of parties claim to represent the working class. Lots of other parties do claim it, too, don’t they? They may be wrong in your eyes but they do claim to represent the working class.”

Marsden continued, “Well certainly none of the mass parties claim to represent the working class, including the Labour Party. The Labour Party is a party of big business. It’s committed to austerity, it’s committed to cuts. It’s committed to militarism, such as the conflict that is developing in the Ukraine, which is extremely dangerous for the working class of Europe. After all, they are pushing Russia under conditions in which they could very easily develop into a war in Europe.”

Coburn then pointed out that the SEP came tenth out of 15 parties in the European elections in Britain, and asked, “Do you still think it’s worth the effort?”

Marsden replied, “Yes. First of all we have very limited resources. If we were able to do a mass circulation of our material, we would have got a better vote. But we are not a parliamentary party. We base ourselves on the class struggle. Our conception of intervening in these elections is to give a voice and a perspective to the working class. Seriously, our party’s growth will be conditioned to the extent to which the working class moves into political struggle. And if you don’t think that’s going to happen, then you’re blind, because this situation cannot continue. You can’t have the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer *ad infinitum*, without there being a serious shift in the political consciousness of broad layers of the working class”.

The *BBC* has published an article on Marsden's interview with Coburn on the Politics section of its main web site, under the headline, “Socialist Equality Party's Chris Marsden on BBC bias”. Also included alongside the article is the video of the interview. The article notes, “A European election candidate claimed his only BBC TV interview ahead of the 22 May polls ‘demonstrated bias’ and appeared to suggest socialists were in favour of persecuting journalists”. It adds, “Marsden ‘later spoke to Jo Coburn about his party's policies, and its bid to represent the working class. And

he said of his earlier interview: ‘Your viewers deserve better’.

Monday’s Daily Politics show, including the segment regarding the SEP’s complaint and Marsden's interview with Jo Coburn can be seen here, beginning at 19:13. It is available until June 10 at the BBC’s web site. The full Daily Politics episode can also be downloaded from the same page. Downloaded BBC programmes can be kept up to 30 days. Once you start to play a programme, you have up to 7 days before the download is deleted.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)