

Socialist Equality Party (UK) 2015 General Election manifesto: No to war and austerity! Fight for socialism!

The Socialist Equality Party (UK)
30 March 2015

The following is the manifesto of the Socialist Equality Party (UK) for the May 7 British General Election.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers and youth to vote for our candidates, Katie Rhodes in Glasgow Central and David O'Sullivan in Holborn and St. Pancras.

We seek to mobilise working people in a political struggle against austerity and war through the fight for a workers' government based on socialist policies.

The financial crash of 2008 was only the beginning of a systemic breakdown of the capitalist profit system. Everywhere, austerity, social inequality, the assault on democratic rights and the turn to militarism are the new normal.

These matters of life and death are entirely excluded from discussion in this election. Under conditions of widespread political disaffection, the sole concern of the ruling class is to cobble together a government that will allow them to carry on with their disastrous policies.

As in 1914 and 1939, the basic contradictions of the world capitalist system—between globalised production and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states, and between socialised production and private ownership of the means of production—threaten humanity with catastrophe.

There is no parliamentary solution to this crisis. Whatever party or combination of parties form the next government—Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Scottish National Party (SNP), UK Independence Party (UKIP)—makes no fundamental difference. All are bought-and-paid-for tools of the super-rich, whose primary purpose is to ensure that the voice of working people is silenced. Every major decision will continue to be made on behalf of the only constituency that really counts—the corporate and financial elite.

The international working class is the only social force capable of putting an end to capitalism—the root cause of economic chaos and war. To carry this forward, one thing above all is necessary—a new party based on socialist internationalism.

The danger of a new world war

These elections take place under conditions in which the NATO powers, led by the US and Britain, have utilised the Western-backed coup in Ukraine to despatch thousands of troops and advanced weaponry to the states bordering Russia.

Their immediate aim is to engineer regime-change in Moscow, as part of a broader geopolitical strategy for world domination.

Since the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States has embarked on a military rampage to control access to markets, raw materials, sources of cheap labour and profits against its rivals in Europe and Asia. Like the early 20th Century, at the centre of this offensive is control over Eurasia, the vast land mass stretching from Western Europe through the Middle East to China.

The US is not alone. All the major powers seek to find a way out of the economic crisis by strengthening their own position on the world arena at the expense of their competitors.

In this drive to re-divide the globe, British imperialism is playing a filthy role. Behind the back of the population, a criminal cabal of government officials, military and intelligence operatives and their associated think tanks and media propagandists are hatching plans aimed at recapturing something of the glory days of Empire by riding on the coattails of the US military.

The UK is taking the lead role in NATO's 30,000-strong Rapid Reaction Force in Eastern Europe and has sent military "advisors" to Ukraine, placing Britain at the centre of provocations against Russia. As soon as the election is over, British troops are to be sent back into Iraq. This is accompanied by demands for increased military spending.

Anyone who believes the horrors of two world wars taught the ruling elites a lesson is gravely mistaken. If anything, the present-day bourgeoisie is even more reckless and stupid than its predecessors. Beset by mounting economic and social problems for which it has no progressive solution, it sees war as a risk worth taking.

The age of austerity

The defining feature of life in every country is the huge growth in social inequality. The wealth of the world's top 85 billionaires equals that of half the world's population. A group of people that could fit into a double-decker bus control more wealth than 3.5 billion people, equivalent to the combined populations of China, India, the United States and the European Union.

In the UK, just five families control more wealth than the poorest 20 percent of the population, or nearly 13 million people. The richest one percent controls as much wealth as 55 percent of the population.

To an unprecedented degree, the relentless accumulation of personal wealth by the privileged few has been separated from the creation of real value through the production of goods and services. This is the outcome of a deliberate policy undertaken by the ruling class over decades, and escalated since 2008. Governments internationally have pumped trillions

of pounds into propping up the financial system. In Britain alone, the total debt incurred by the bank bailout stands at over £1 trillion, an amount that is increasing by £5,170 per second.

This plundering of public funds has done nothing to promote real economic growth, much less create decent-paying jobs or fund vitally needed social services. Instead, it has been used to carry through a further massive transfer of wealth to a layer of social parasites, with the result that the wealthiest 20 percent of the population are 64 percent richer than before 2008, while the poorest 20 percent are 57 percent worse off.

The austerity measures first introduced by the Labour government and extended under the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition have led to the destruction of almost one million public-sector jobs and the handing over of health, education and social service budgets to the private sector.

More than 13 million people live in poverty, including almost one-third of all children. The working poor make up the largest number of those in poverty, with millions eking out an existence on low-pay and often zero-hour contracts. Real wages have fallen by a total of more than 15 percent since 2008, if inflation is taken into account.

Any hope of a decent future for the younger generation is being destroyed. Three quarters of a million 16-24 year olds, one in six, are without work, and one in three has been jobless for more than 12 months. Young people are being targeted for benefit cuts to force them into menial jobs or bogus apprenticeships that pay as little as £2.73 an hour. In England and Wales, students face extortionate university tuition fees and a lifetime of debt that will permanently exclude millions from the housing market. Across the UK, wages for the under-30s have declined by as much as 10 percent, setting a new and ever lower benchmark.

This is only the start. All the parties are committed to further spending cuts that will dwarf anything seen so far. That is why Parliament voted overwhelmingly to rush through the Budgetary Responsibility Bill, committing all future governments to permanent austerity—making a mockery of any notion of democratic accountability.

Workers and young people must draw the bitter lessons of Greece, which has been the test-bed for the international offensive to impose austerity throughout Europe. Widespread social discontent led to the victory in January's election of Syriza, the so-called Coalition of the Radical Left, which had pledged to reverse these attacks. But Europe's ruling elite was determined to demonstrate that there was no alternative to austerity and threatened to bankrupt Greece. Within a month, Syriza agreed to abide by the diktats of the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank.

These events prove that none of the great problems facing working people can be resolved without ending the dictatorship of the financial oligarchy. It is a cancer on society that must be excised.

The assault on democratic rights

Obscene levels of social inequality and escalating militarism are incompatible with democratic forms of rule. Indeed, the more the UK economy has become dependent on rampant speculation, the more fully have corruption and outright criminality infected every national institution—from Parliament and its parties to the media, the judiciary, the police and the trade unions.

Every day some scandal erupts involving the top echelons of the political and financial elite, which invariably goes unpunished. Conversely, social discontent is met with ever more naked repression.

Legal restraints on the exercise of arbitrary state power, stretching back to the Magna Carta of 1215, have been overturned. Britain is complicit in the horrors of Guantanamo Bay, extraordinary rendition, torture, and

imprisonment without trial. A massive surveillance network has been assembled, directed against the population at home. For exposing this illegal conspiracy, Edward Snowden and Julian Assange have been persecuted and forced to seek asylum.

All of this is justified by the “war on terror” and hypocritical references to the defence of “free speech” against Islamic extremism. In reality, the imperialist powers are responsible for the growth of organisations such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, not only through their criminal interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also, as in Libya and Syria, through their role in financing and arming these organisations.

Now they seek to use the monster they created to divide the working class and justify greater repressive powers. Just like the whipping up of anti-Semitism in Germany in the 1930s, the promotion of UKIP and anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim propaganda is a sign that the ruling elite is seeking to build up fascist-type organisations, similar to the National Front in France and Golden Dawn in Greece.

The promotion of nationalism and regionalism

The claim that devolution in Scotland, Wales and the English regions offers an alternative to Westminster's neo-liberal and militarist agenda is a lie.

The aim of all such moves is to finally divest central government of any responsibility to fund social welfare measures and to smash up national wage rates and working conditions by encouraging inter-regional competition. Above all, they are directed against a unified class struggle in opposition to the powers-that-be.

The fact that the Scottish National Party (SNP) is fully prepared to support a Labour government at Westminster exposes all claims it stands on the left. It is the political representative of a section of the bourgeoisie that hopes to secure a greater share in the exploitation of working people by turning Scotland into a cheap-labour, low-tax investment platform. Its main demand is for the slashing of corporation tax and for Edinburgh to control tax revenues from North Sea oil.

The same essential economic imperatives lie behind the Conservatives' championing, in league with sections of the Labour Party, of a “Devo-Max” agenda for England.

In an unprecedented move, Greater Manchester is to be given control over its entire £6 billion National Health Service budget. This is a major step towards full-scale privatisation. London Mayor Boris Johnson is leading a campaign involving cities such as Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Newcastle, Liverpool and Nottingham to roll out devolution across England—all in the name of “reducing dependency”, the standard euphemism for cuts.

For the political independence of the working class

The reactionary policies of the ruling elite are unleashing outrage and opposition everywhere. But this resistance finds no political expression. Workers and youth have been politically disenfranchised, without any organisation to defend their interests.

Labour is a right-wing party of big business, no different than the Tories. The turn to war and austerity began under the Blair and Brown governments. Should it take office, Labour will continue where the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition leave off.

For decades, the trade unions have played the key role in suppressing

strikes and demobilising the working class. They are not workers' organisations, but agencies of a well-paid industrial police force acting on behalf of government and the corporations. The defence of jobs, wages and conditions today requires a political rebellion against the Labour and trade union bureaucracy.

The Green Party and other organisations that posture as "left" alternatives to Labour are nothing of the sort. Where they have been in government, as in Germany and Ireland, the Greens have imposed austerity and supported war under the banner of "human rights."

The same applies to groups such as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and Left Unity. Representing better-off layers of the upper-middle class, these pseudo-left tendencies see the crisis only as an opportunity to further their own careers and gain lucrative posts in the trade union bureaucracy and the state apparatus. Their role model is Syriza in Greece, which betrayed its election promises and agreed to impose austerity rather than mount any challenge to capitalism and its institutions.

Build the Socialist Equality Party

Only an international party that sets out to overthrow the profit system offers a way forward. The Socialist Equality Party is the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). We fight to mobilise the billions-strong working class in a revolutionary offensive to end the irrational division of the planet into hostile nation states and establish world socialism, based on production for the needs of the many, not the profit of the few.

Together with our sister parties, the SEP bases itself on the tradition of the decades-long struggle by the most courageous and far-sighted representatives of the working class for socialism against all forms of political opportunism. Key to the education and organisation of the most conscious workers and youth is the daily *World Socialist Web Site*, published by the ICFI.

The political rearming of the working class depends upon assimilating the strategic experiences of the 20th century—above all, disproving the lie that Stalinism equals socialism. The police-military dictatorship that arose in the Soviet Union was not the inheritor of the egalitarian and internationalist perspective of the 1917 October Revolution, but its bitter enemy.

Stalin's policy of "socialism in one country" articulated the interests of a bureaucracy that secured its control of the state apparatus in Russia in a bloody campaign of repression directed against the genuine representatives of the Revolution, led by Leon Trotsky. The Stalinist bureaucracy was responsible for a whole series of international defeats of the working class. Its counterrevolutionary role reached its high point in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reintroduction of capitalism and the rule of a criminal oligarchy, now headed by Putin.

Our party originates in, and continues, the struggle of the Left Opposition, formed by Trotsky in defence of the perspective of world socialist revolution, on which the Fourth International was founded in 1938.

For a workers' government and socialist policies

Socialism cannot be achieved through the election of socialist candidates to Parliament and other institutions of the capitalist state. It

requires the formation of new organisations of struggle dedicated to the taking of political power by the working class.

A workers' government—elected directly from the factories, offices and workplaces, as well as working class neighbourhoods—would be charged with implementing socialist policies that meet the vital needs of the people.

End militarism and war

The SEP fights for a socialist foreign policy based on international working class solidarity. We stand for the immediate withdrawal of all British forces from overseas and the closure of all British military bases. We say: Not a single penny for war! Put the war criminals in Westminster and Washington on trial!

For the socialist reorganisation of society

The SEP fights for an end to the anarchy and wastefulness of the profit system. We call for the cancellation of all debts to the international financial institutions and the transformation of the banks and major corporations into publicly owned and democratically controlled utilities. The wealth must be taken from the billionaires and used to meet essential social needs. All austerity measures must be reversed and billions poured into the economy to end unemployment and provide decent-paying jobs, free and high-quality health care, housing, education and social services for all.

Defend democratic rights

The state's mass spying apparatus—MI5, MI6 and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ)—must be shut down. All anti-terror legislation and other measures that curtail individual liberties must be rescinded. All anti-strike legislation and discriminatory measures targeting immigrants and asylum seekers must be repealed. The persecution of Julian Assange, Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning must be halted.

For the United Socialist States of Europe

The fight for socialism in Britain is part of a unified offensive of the European and international working class. The SEP calls for a continent-wide struggle against the European Union, which is an instrument of the major corporations and banks for driving down wages and conditions and for pursuing the military aims of the imperialist powers. The EU must be overthrown and replaced by a United Socialist States of Europe. This is the only way to prevent the descent of the continent into nationalism and war, and to create the conditions for Europe to mobilize its vast resources in the interests of society as a whole.

We ask all those who agree with these policies to vote for our candidates, participate in our campaign and make the decision to join and

build the Socialist Equality Party.

For further details visit: www.socialequality.org.uk



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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