

SEP candidate for Glasgow Central addresses Caledonian University hustings

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Katie Rhodes, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for the Glasgow Central constituency in the May 7 General Election, spoke to a hustings at Caledonian University on Wednesday.

Some 17,000 students are at Caledonian University, which has the largest number of part-time students in Scotland.

The hustings was organised by the Students Association and featured five Glasgow Central candidates in addition to Rhodes—Anas Sarwar (Scottish Labour Party-SLP), Alison Thewliss (Scottish National Party-SNP), Cass Macgregor (Scottish Green Party), Simon Bone (Scottish Conservatives) and Chris Young (Scottish Liberal Democrats).

Not only was Rhodes the only socialist speaking, but she was also the only one speaking for a party that did not define itself as “Scottish”.

In her three-minute introduction, Rhodes said, “The SEP is unique among the parties because we are the only ones telling the truth in these elections. All the other parties are spinning lies to suit the interests of big business. Whatever party or combination of parties wins this election, they will continue the attacks on the working class.”

“This is because the financial crash of 2008 was only the start of a systemic breakdown of capitalism,” she went on. “In Britain alone, the bank bailout cost more than £1 trillion. This has gone straight into the pockets of the super-rich, who have seen their wealth rise to record levels.”

Rhodes asked the audience to consider the fact that just 85 individuals control more wealth than 3.5 billion people—the populations of China, India, the United States and the European Union combined. While the fortunes of the super-rich had reached record proportions, the jobs, wages and conditions of workers

and young people were being destroyed, she said.

“None of the great problems facing workers and youth can be resolved without ending the dictatorship of the super-rich over virtually every aspect of social and economic life,” she stressed. This was especially the case when the capitalist crisis was preparing the way for a new third world war.

Rhodes highlighted Britain’s role in NATO’s provocations against Russia. Only recently it had sent military advisers to Ukraine and Syria, and was intent on sending troops back to Iraq. But these life-and-death questions were being excluded from discussion in the election.

Her warning was borne out by the contributions of the other candidates, none of whom addressed the questions of growing social inequality and the drive to war. Instead, they sought to compete as to who best could stand up for “Scotland’s interests.”

Thewliss claimed that last September’s referendum on Scottish independence had galvanised many people and that as a result the SNP was best placed to “shake up Westminster” and “win powers back to the people in Scotland.”

Sarwar claimed that the choice was between sending the Tories “a message or putting them out of office” by voting Labour.

In the likely event of a hung parliament, an SNP-backed Labour government is a distinct possibility and one that the SNP has been pressing for. As a result, the SNP and Labour largely gave each other a free pass. But that was only one expression of a platform that had all the characteristics of an “old pals’ club”, one from which the working class is entirely excluded.

Bone, a businessman, spoke of the Conservatives’ “success” in government, while Young showed no shame when he boasted that the Liberal Democrats had

ensured 75 percent of their policies had been implemented by the coalition government—the same one that has been responsible for an unprecedented decline in workers’ wages and conditions. The Liberal Democrats had proved they were prepared to get “dirty hands,” Young said.

The SEP campaigned at the university in the lead-up to the hustings, where they had serious discussions with many students on the questions of austerity, war and Scottish nationalism. Almost 200 copies of the SEP manifesto, “No to war and austerity—Fight for Socialism,” were distributed.

The response on campus was in contrast to the small audience at the hustings, consisting mainly of academics and Student Association activists. Many of the questions raised expressed what passes for “progressive” policies in this milieu.

The issue of electoral reform was discussed, without reference to the stranglehold of the super-rich and big business over political life and the accompanying assault on democratic rights. No amount of tinkering with the existing setup could perfect the electoral system, Rhodes said. The real issue was the fact that the working class needed its own political party.

There were several questions on “women’s issues,” including the need for gender quotas and the abolition of Valued Added Tax on sanitary provision. Even Bone was able to speak sympathetically on such subjects, cautioning only that “soft” quotas on the gender balance in employment, politics and business might be preferable.

Only Rhodes rooted opposition to all forms of discrimination in the fight for social equality. Opposing gender quotas, she explained that such issues were used as a diversion from the real class basis of inequality in the capitalist profit system.

Only when one unemployed audience member spoke of being vilified and subject to harsh financial sanctions under the coalition’s draconian welfare measures did the realities of life for millions intrude into the debate.

Thewliss and Sarwar repeated their meaningless plans for a “jobs guarantee” and a small hike in the minimum wage, as if they would resolve anything. Macgregor spoke of the Greens’ plans to guarantee each person what even she described as a “very small” income. The Greens’ Citizens Income proposal consists of just £72 per week, but party leader Natalie Bennett has said

even this would take some time to implement.

Rhodes described her experience as a Welfare Rights Officer, working with the victims of benefit sanctions. The other candidates might complain about this or that aspect of austerity, she said, but none of them address the fact that this is part and parcel of a systematic assault on the social gains of the working class that was taking place in every country across the globe.

Rhodes’s assertion that all the parties were complicit in austerity brought a protest from Macgregor, who asked the SEP candidate to explain how the Greens were responsible. When Rhodes pointed to the role that the Green Party had played in government in Ireland and Germany in directly imposing savage cuts, Macgregor complained that she represented the “Scottish Greens” before conceding that they are part of the “European Green movement.”

On the final question of what type of government each candidate would prefer to see after May 7, Rhodes reiterated that the outcome would make no difference to workers and youth.

Summing up in her closing remarks, Rhodes said that the SEP stood against all forms of nationalism and for the unity of the international working class in the struggle against austerity and war.

Labour and the SNP were capitalist parties, she stressed, that had nothing to do with working people. Workers needed their own party, one directed to the fight for a workers’ government based on socialist policies. She concluded by urging people to read the *World Socialist Web Site* and participate in the International May Day online rally being hosted by the WSWs and the International Committee of the Fourth International on May 3.

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



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact