

“Nothing can be resolved without ending the dictatorship of the super-rich”

SEP candidate for Glasgow Central Katie Rhodes speaks at hustings

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Seventy people attended an election hustings for the Glasgow Central constituency, hosted Thursday afternoon by the Garnethill Community Council. Held in part of the iconic Glasgow School of Art complex, it attracted local residents and students.

Socialist Equality Party candidate Katie Rhodes was among the seven candidates participating from the Conservatives, Labour, Scottish National Party (SNP), Scottish Greens and Liberal Democrats. The election agent for the pseudo-left Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) also took part in the event which was live streamed by Democracy TV.

Each candidate gave a two minute opening statement. Rhodes spoke first, telling the audience, “Whichever party or combination of parties win the May 7 election the attacks on the living conditions of the working class will continue.”

“The financial crash of 2008 was only the beginning of the breakdown of the capitalist system,” she said. The bailout of the bank, costing £1 trillion in Britain alone, had gone straight into the pockets of the super-rich who have seen their wealth rise to record levels, with just 85 people in the world holding as much wealth as 3.5 billion people.

“Nothing can be resolved without the ending of the dictatorship of the super-rich,” she said, under conditions in which the capitalist crisis was leading to the danger of a third world war.

Rhodes concluded by stating that the SEP is standing in the elections to mobilise workers and youth as part of mass international movement against austerity and war.

Under conditions of widespread hostility to Labour, the sitting Labour MP for Glasgow Central, Anas Sarwar, is faced with the possibility of losing his seat.

At Thursday’s hustings, Sarwar tried to distance himself from his party’s record in office and its responsibility for initiating the austerity measures taken over by the Conservative-led coalition. He promised a measly £8 an hour minimum wage over the next five years and an end to zero hour contracts. But even these sops are contradicted by Labour’s pledge to “fiscal responsibility”.

The same stance was taken by the SNP and Green candidates, trying to combine pledges to hike up the minimum wage, with their commitment to paying down the deficit, i.e., ensuring a further massive transfer of funds from working people to the banks and super-rich.

Speaking for TUSC, Dennis Fallen avoided any mention of the crisis of global capitalism, claiming that the deficit could be wiped out through the simple imposition of a 0.5 percent tax on all stock market transactions, the so-called “Robin Hood” tax.

Questions from the audience underscored the growing political gulf between working people and the ruling elite and its parties.

A 59-year-old carer with various chronic health conditions told of being declared fit for work and being faced with the removal of benefits under the coalitions’ punitive welfare sanctions.

While several of the candidates claimed to be horrified at this, they had little to say on how it should be changed.

Rhodes explained that in her role as a local authority welfare rights officer she has to confront the draconian effects that sanctions have on people’s lives every day. She reminded the audience that welfare reform had begun under the previous Labour government, and was extended by the coalition.

Warning of any illusions that an SNP-led devolved

government would mean an end to such assaults, she warned, “Think again”. What the other candidates would not address, she said, was that the welfare sanctions were part of a global onslaught on the conditions and rights over working people in the interests of the financial elite. Opposing such assaults was bound up with a fight against the profit system. “The capitalist system has to go,” she said.

The second question posed was whether the parties supported the renewal of Britain’s Trident nuclear weapons system and under what circumstances their parties would be prepared to use nuclear weapons.

Again the various candidates sought to adapt to anti-war sentiment and to conceal their party’s role in facilitating war preparations. The Labour candidate claimed he was in favour of looking for a cheap option to Trident, even though Labour leader Ed Miliband has ruled out any question of removing Britain’s nuclear capability. The SNP candidate made great play of opposing Trident, while concealing her party’s support for the NATO nuclear bloc.

Rhodes explained that the SEP is opposed to Trident, but she warned no confidence could be placed in any of the mainstream parties to oppose war. Behind the backs of working people, the ruling elite were engaged in the reckless escalation of militarism, creating the conditions for a new world war that would involve nuclear powers.

Rhodes cited the NATO operation, Joint Warrior, currently underway off the coast of Scotland as an example of how the issue of Trident was being used to divert from broader dangers. The audience listened intently as she outlined the scale of this exercise, and its connection with other military manoeuvres by NATO.

War was the flip side of austerity, she said, as its source was the drive by respective national ruling elites to grab new resources and markets under a crisis-ridden capitalist system.

The final question underscored widespread anti-war sentiment. To a round of enthusiastic applause, a questioner asked whether the candidates agreed that “Tony Blair and his entire 2003 Labour government cabinet should be put on trial as war criminals at the Hague” for its involvement in the illegal war against Iraq that had led to the deaths of one million men, women and children. Answer “Yes or No,” the questioner demanded.

In his typically duplicitous manner, Sarwar claimed the war was a mistake and that he had taken part in marches against it in London and Glasgow. Why he remained a member of the Labour Party, he naturally did not address.

His real stance was made clear by his refusal to state whether Blair and his cabinet should be tried as war criminals.

Sarwar’s pose as an opponent of war is a fraud. Last September, the vast majority of Labour MPs, including Sarwar, voted for air strikes on Iraq, using the pretext of the fight against Islamic State in Iraq (ISIS)—which developed out of US-led wars and interventions in the Middle East that were backed by the 1997-2010 British Labour government.

Rhodes replied to the question, “Absolutely one hundred percent yes!” She insisted that the demand that Blair and his co-conspirators stand trial had to be taken up more broadly.

Most importantly, workers and youth had to understand that war arises from the crisis of the capitalist system. Blair’s criminal actions were taken in his capacity as a representative of big business, she said.

In response to the Conservative candidate Simon Bone’s assertion that “we” need to “defend Britain,” Rhodes said that the “we” he was referring to was the banks and super-rich.

In her closing remarks Rhodes addressed events in Greece where the working class has been struggling against severe austerity imposed by the IMF and European Union. The last elections had seen the election of a supposedly “socialist” government under Syriza, but in just 14 days that government reneged on its promises to fight austerity and is imposing the bankers’ diktats. Parties such as TUSC wanted to emulate Syriza in Scotland and throughout the UK.

“If the conditions for war exist then the conditions for revolution exist also,” she said, urging workers and youth to participate in the online International May Day rally being held on May 3 by the International Committee of the Fourth International *l*, *World Socialist Web Site* and the SEP.

Afterwards many audience members came forward to thank Rhodes for her remarks and to ask for further discussion. *For further details visit:* <http://socialequality.org.uk/>



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