

SEP speaker at London election meeting: Only socialism can bring about genuine equality

Our reporter
21 April 2015

Paul Stickley, the election agent for the Socialist Equality Party candidate in the May 7 General Election, David O’Sullivan, took part in an “Equality is Better for Everyone” hustings last Thursday.

O’Sullivan is the SEP candidate in the London constituency of Holborn and St. Pancras. Katie Rhodes is standing in Glasgow Central.

The hustings was organised by the Friends of Highgate Library, set up in 1995 to protect and promote the use of the historic building, which now organises volunteers to help keep it open following massive cuts by Labour-controlled Camden Council.

The theme of the hustings was the book *The Spirit Level*, published in 2009 by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett of the Equality Trust. Excerpts of a new film, based on the book, due to be released later this year were shown and introduced by director Katharine Round and producer Christopher Hird.

The basic premise of *The Spirit Level* is that social problems are worse in countries that are more unequal and that British governments should be more like Sweden or Japan. Round said the problem was the “corruption of the market.”

This was the position adopted by two of those at the hustings, Labour leader of Camden Council Sarah Hayward and Camden’s sole Green councillor, Sian Berry. They both said governments can’t do everything, however, and it was necessary for private sector companies to be “more responsible.”

The representative from the Conservative Party spent his time trying to justify zero-hour contracts.

Questions from the audience included, “Does inequality make the economy more inefficient?” “What would the candidates do about the shortage of

affordable housing?” and “Should there be more income equality?”

One angry audience member, Andy, told the speakers that there is a “crisis of capitalism and the rich want to hold onto their money.”

He accused the governing parties of “being in bed with big business” and forcing people into crime and food banks because of benefit cuts and sanctions. Deriding them as “middle class liberals,” he asked how many could live on £72 a week.

Stickley declared that equality was possible only with socialism. The work of Pickett and Wilkinson was to be welcomed for having raised the issue of inequality, he said, adding:

“The warmth of the response to the work is the product of widening and deepening hostility to the free-market programme and growing opposition to the official political establishment that has promoted it. The fact that no party is able to command majority support is just one sign of the alienation from official politics.

“The issue of inequality has undoubtedly struck a chord with the many millions who find it more and more difficult to make ends meet or are trapped in poverty. But escalating opposition to pervasive inequality inevitably raises the question: What is to be done? How can anger at the depredations of the ‘free market’ be translated into an alternative programme?

“It is here the prescriptions advanced by the authors, the Equality Trust and others falls flat. What is being offered is for Britain to be a bit more like Sweden and Japan, France and Germany—anywhere where public spending is a little higher....

“The fact remains that Sweden, Japan, France and

Germany want to be more like the UK and the US.

“Sweden, long praised as a role model for social harmony, is now cited as the country with the fastest growing levels of social inequality in the OECD. Japan is led by a right-wing warmonger committed to remilitarisation, austerity and pro-market restructuring.

“Why, you have to ask, given such hostility to inequality and the sound arguments saying it does not make sense, does it keep on growing?

“Politics is not a debating society where you can convince the other side of the correctness of your position. Every country in the world is run by political parties that represent the interests of a semi-criminal financial oligarchy.

“A few score super-rich with more money than anyone in world history want nothing else than even more money for themselves. And they get it because parties of whatever formal colouration, blue, red, green, do their bidding.

“It doesn’t matter how many times you profess opposition to austerity if you continue to accept capitalism. Anyone who doesn’t believe this should look at Syriza, as it goes cap in hand to the European Union and International Monetary Fund pleading it will implement at least 70 percent of the austerity measures demanded of it.

“The SEP stands unambiguously for the overthrow of the profit system and for socialism. We are for a workers’ government and an economy run to meet the social needs of the many, not the selfish thirst for profits of the few.

“We don’t accept that all you can hope for is a bit more income equality and leave the real source of far greater inequality untouched. We intend to expropriate the banks and corporations and the vast personal fortunes of the super-rich. A socialist Britain, part of a United Socialist States of Europe and a socialist world, is the only way to bring about genuine equality.”

An audio file of the hustings is available [here](#).

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



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact