

Glasgow Care Crisis hustings: Pseudo-left make overtures to the Scottish National Party

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The poster for the Glasgow Care Crisis General Election Hustings announced that candidates had been “invited from Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Greens, SNP and TUSC,” otherwise known as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

Although the meeting was being held in her constituency, the organisers said in an e-mail that they had taken a “democratic decision” not to invite Katie Rhodes, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) candidate for Glasgow Central, as there was “already a large platform of speakers.”

This is a travesty of democracy. The purpose of a hustings is to enable voters to hear about and question the parties contesting an election. In excluding the SEP, Glasgow Care Crisis were unilaterally deciding which parties *they* believed voters had a right to be informed of.

The decision was taken for politically sectarian reasons. Glasgow Care Crisis is run by various pseudo-left groups, including members of TUSC, who all supported the Yes Campaign led by the Scottish National Party (SNP) in last year’s Scottish independence referendum. Their blog carries a banner from the Radical Independence Campaign, the vehicle through which various pseudo-left groups mobilised support for a Yes vote, hoping this would open the door to the corridors of power in Holyrood.

The exclusion of the SEP was meant to keep it from voicing its criticism of their rotten politics and role as cheerleaders for the union bureaucracy, who are responsible for selling out one dispute after another.

As it turned out the event was not so much a hustings as a gathering of various pseudo-lefts talking to themselves—and engaging in friendly discussion with the representative of the SNP. The audience of approximately 25 largely consisted of members of the

Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, the Scottish Socialist Party and Tommy Sheridan’s pro-SNP Solidarity, along with a smattering of union bureaucrats.

Entirely absent was any significant participation of workers or young people. Although the organisers made much of their “support” for the 70 homelessness caseworkers who have been on strike since March 31 against cuts in their pay and conditions being imposed by Glasgow City Council, it would appear no one from the strike had been invited to address the meeting.

As the hustings started, any workers who might have found themselves in the audience would have been astonished when, despite the failure of the Labour and Conservative candidates to put in an appearance, the chairperson still refused to allow Katie Rhodes to speak from the now-depleted platform.

After this was publicly challenged, the chair finally agreed that Katie could make a two-minute statement from the floor.

Once the meeting started, neither the TUSC nor the Green speakers contested the SNP’s claim to be an “anti-austerity” party. Instead, they largely agreed that the problems facing social care in Glasgow, one of the main issues discussed, were all the responsibility of the Labour-led city council.

Susan Aitken, leader of the SNP opposition on Glasgow City Council, boasted that it was the Scottish government that had passed the “Self Directed Support” legislation, which is being used to gut social services everywhere, claiming it was about providing “choice” and “dignity.” Like Pontius Pilate, she absolved the SNP of all responsibility, complaining it was Glasgow City Council that had used it “as an excuse for cuts.” Her comments were agreed with by both TUSC and the Greens.

“The SNP is going to Westminster to end austerity and to be a voice for those at the sharp end of the austerity agenda,” Aitken told the meeting, without contradiction from the platform or the audience.

As the meeting progressed, it became increasingly clear that the chair was ignoring Katie Rhodes’ request to make her statement. Only after a number of SEP members intervened to demand she be allowed to speak, as agreed, did the chair reluctantly call Rhodes to address the meeting.

She explained that the SEP was seeking to mobilise working people in a political struggle against austerity and war through the fight for a workers’ government based on socialist policies.

Addressing the record of the trade unions during the five years of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government, Rhodes drew particular attention to the public sector pensions’ dispute. Within two years of millions taking part in a one-day strike and in huge demonstrations, the dispute was fully wound down, as one union after another did a deal with the government.

“These are the people leading the Glasgow caseworkers’ dispute, and I can say with certainty that based on this record, it will be betrayed—as soon as possible after May 7.

Rhodes stated that the SEP rejected the claim of TUSC that the unions can and must be the basis for a new workers’ party, noting that one of TUSC’s lead unions, the Prison Officers Association (POA), has signed a no-strike deal with the SNP government in Holyrood.

At this point, although all other speakers had been allowed to make extensive remarks lasting five minutes or more, the chair started to bang on the table and called for Rhodes to sit down. When she nevertheless continued, one of the organisers jumped up and stood provocatively in front of her.

Rhodes concluded saying, “Any effort by working people to defend their jobs and living standards requires a political and organisational rebellion against the unions. It means building a new socialist party that is not in hock to the bureaucracy and which tells the truth.”

TUSC candidate Angela McCormick chose to leave it to the SNP speaker to defend the role of the POA, with Aitken claiming there was “no no-strike deal.”

As the meeting drew to a close, comments made by

the TUSC representative cast a further light on the rotten alliance the pseudo-left entered into last year in the Scottish referendum campaign—and why they gave the SNP speaker a free pass at the hustings. McCormick said it was next year’s elections to the Scottish parliament that were the real prize. Clearly, with the SNP set to wipe out Labour throughout Scotland, TUSC and the various pseudo-left groups in Scotland hope for a place in Holyrood as the “loyal opposition” to an SNP government following the 2016 election.

In case further proof is needed of the nationalist scoundrels that the organisers attracted to the hustings, following the meeting Katie Rhodes was asked by a participant, “What are you doing here? You’re not even Scottish.”

For further details visit www.socialequality.org.uk



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