

People's Assembly London demonstration: Protesters speak on austerity, war and EU referendum

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party intervened in Saturday's demonstration with its statement "For an active boycott of the Brexit referendum," referring to the June 23 ballot on Britain's continued membership in the European Union.

In opposition to the right-wing, nationalist stance of both the official Remain and Leave camps, the SEP is fighting to develop a political movement of the working class based on workers' international unity and socialism.

Darren, a bar worker, said he and friend Simon heard about the demonstration on social media and came especially to support those fighting in defence of the National Health Service. They brought a homemade banner protesting the privatisation of the NHS and other public services.

Darren said, "I supported Jeremy Corbyn becoming Labour leader. I think I still do. He's the only one that represents hope. Although I guess that was the same thing with President Obama. We can all see that was a smokescreen for the same policies continuing. The same with Syriza in Greece."

Asked his opinion of the Socialist Equality Party's call for an active boycott of June's referendum on Britain's EU membership, Simon said, "I'd love it if all the borders were torn down and we could live in peace. But it's difficult to see how it could be done. Under capitalism there will always be war. It's all about oil and natural resources. But there has to be an alternative. I will read your pamphlet and look at your web site."

Gemma, a student nurse, was critical of those who spoke on the People's Assembly platform. She said, "It makes me mad to hear the speakers talk about

supporting us and the junior doctors. It's all words. I have heard it so many times since we have been taking action. If they really supported us, they would be bringing out their members as well. After all, NHS workers have suffered years of freezes to their wages and had their pensions cut too.

"Len McCluskey [Unite general secretary] thinks it's funny to put on his panama hat and joke about tax evasion. I would say he is the joke, if it wasn't so serious. He will go down in history as the leader of the biggest union who presided over the destruction of the welfare system and did nothing about it. It's the same with what is happening with the steel industry. There's a lot of support for the steel workers, and yet McCluskey and Unite don't get other people involved. The union shouldn't be called Unite, it should be called Disunite.

"It's also the same with the teachers' leader [National Union of Teachers General Secretary Christine Blower]. Schools are being turned into academies all over the place and she's done nothing about it. I agree we have to start doing things without the unions. They can't be trusted. We can't rely on them anymore."

Of the Labour Party, Gemma said, "John McDonnell's speech was just as bad. I thought he and Corbyn would make a difference. But they are backtracking on everything they said before and he has the nerve to tell us to have courage and determination. He says we ought to bring the Tories down, but I don't think he really believes that. And if he did, the rest of the Labour MPs don't. So it will end up waiting until 2020 when and if we get a Labour government. But, there won't be an NHS by then."

Asked what she thought of the SEP's position on the EU referendum, Gemma said, "I agree with what your party is saying about the Europe referendum. I hadn't thought about a boycott before. It's true that whether people vote to stay in or go out, austerity policies and privatisation will continue.

"Also, what you said about the threat of a Third World War; all these things are tied up. You listen to these people speaking at this demo and they have such small minds. They're just interested in feathering their own nests. It will be disastrous if we leave it to them. I will have to look up your party on the Internet and come to your meeting."



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