

SEP election teams in Britain win warm response

Our reporters

27 November 2019

Socialist Equality Party election teams have distributed thousands of copies of the party's election statement in Sheffield, Manchester and London.

Campaigners and candidates, Chris Marsden in Sheffield Central and Dennis Leach in Manchester Central, spoke to striking college lecturers, students and postal workers at Royal Mail depots who recently voted by a huge majority to strike in defence of jobs and conditions. Their strike was called off by the Communication Workers Union after a High Court injunction was issued.

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Chris Marsden spoke to Karen, a lecturer at Longley Park Sixth Form College. Karen was on strike and took part in a protest outside Sheffield City Hall, opposing cuts to further education and rejecting a minimal pay increase.

She explained, "I started working for Longley Park in 2004, when it was set up under the Labour government to improve life chances in the second most socially deprived post code in the country. We had students coming to us from local schools that didn't have a sixth form. We are very successful. We give them life changing opportunities. But, unfortunately, in the years that I have worked there, I've seen more and more cuts in finance to students, more and more insecurity, more young teachers coming in exhausted ...

"Education has become unrecognisable since I started being a teacher in 1987. Since 2004 it has become a totally different job. It's more focused on accountability, filling in paper, doing jobs that won't have a positive impact on young people. Our job should be inspiring young people and leading by example by being outstanding teachers. It is becoming more and more difficult to do that, when you are completely worn out and exhausted."

Marsden asked Karen about the cuts being imposed in her area, compared with more prosperous schools.

"If you look across the city, the more affluent areas have had less reduction in their 'pupil premium.' We've had a massive reduction in the pupil premium. Not only that, we've had reduced funding per student, but we have to deliver the same service to them and have had a pay freeze

for quite a few years. Even though we work in a sixth form, we don't get paid as schoolteachers ... That's another thing we are protesting about, the lack of parity in pay." Karen said that the pay difference was "at least £1,500."

"Another thing that is really difficult being a teacher at the moment is the lack of opportunities for young people. Previously, there would be apprenticeships, other jobs for them to go into."

Marsden said that the *World Socialist Web Site* had been reporting on a wave of strikes by teachers and lecturers internationally but that this had not yet translated into a reversal of the attacks on education. Karen agreed, saying "Education just seems to be a toy."

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The CWU has refused to defy the High Court's ban on their strike ballot after 97 percent of union members voted to strike. In practice, this rules out any re-ballot for action until at least the new year.

"For the first time in 30 years I don't think the union are doing right by me," one postal worker told SEP campaigners in Manchester. "It's scandalous what they've done. They've done this because of the general election. They don't want any disruption."

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A central demand of the SEP's general election campaign is for the freedom of WikiLeaks founder and journalist Julian Assange. Luke, a 25-year-old chef, spoke to the SEP at Loretto sixth form college in Hulme, condemning the mistreatment of Assange at the hands of the government.

Luke said, "A large part of the population see Assange as a scapegoat. This is a man taking on the government, a person who is tarred and feathered and made out to be this enemy of humanity. He doesn't look good now, of course he's not going to look good because of what he's been through.

"Any person that makes it their life's mission to reveal the truth, who reveals the secrets that governments don't want us to know, he's going to be persecuted because it's about the interests of a superpower. Laws don't really come into the equation when you're dealing with the people who make

the laws, the people who govern the world. That's a brave thing."

Luke had initially been attracted to Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's anti-war and anti-austerity pose. "Corbyn was the only Labour leader who made me sit up and listen," he said. "I'm at the stage now where I probably will vote, but not because I'm particularly enthusiastic. For me, the big reason I don't trust Labour is because Tony Blair is in it."

"Labour is a completely different entity than in my grandparents' generation. There are towns upon towns where people have got nothing. It began with [Conservative Prime Minister] Thatcher but it continued under Labour governments. I'm from a mining community in Wales. I don't feel like we've ever been looked after, or ever had a voice, no matter what government it's been."

An SEP member explained that the party's intervention in the election was part of a struggle to build an international party, based on the working class, to overthrow capitalism and following in the footsteps of Lenin and Trotsky. Luke said, "I think that is commendable."

The team in Hulme spoke to Marie who teaches at Salford City College. Marie was also on strike in a separate dispute. She opposed the right-wing campaign against Corbyn and the wider left being organised by the Blairites and the Tory government, based on bogus claims that Corbyn and his supporters are anti-Semitic. She also opposed the suspension of Chris Williamson MP from the Labour Party—which was not opposed by Corbyn—and said she had discussed with Jewish friends that the Labour leader was not anti-Semitic. "Talking about the Israeli state does not make you anti-Semitic."

Marie backed the campaign to free Julian Assange saying, "He should not be in jail. All he has done is tell the truth." She pulled out her mobile phone and pointed to the recent news that the Swedish authorities had finally abandoned their investigation into Assange over bogus allegations of sexual misconduct.

Lawrence, a Labour member, spoke with SEP candidate Dennis Leech. "Assange is essentially a journalist," Lawrence noted. "He should be a hero ... I don't get the difference between him and someone who has done some other investigative journalism. I don't understand the persecution of him, in England. I can understand it in America. Why is he languishing in a British prison? When he came out of the Ecuadorian embassy he was unrecognizable."

Leech explained that support for Assange was growing and "we've made it an integral part of our campaign not to let his profile go under." Lawrence said he was "disappointed" in Corbyn's lack of support for Assange. "You'd have thought Assange was the kind of person he would admire. A

rebel standing up for human rights."

When Dennis raised Corbyn's capitulation to Labour's right wing, in the face of their incessant smears against him and his supporters, Lawrence said, "I don't associate anti-Semitism with the Labour party—I get that they are anti-Israel. I associate racism with the right, traditionally, historically. [Labour MP] Jo Cox was murdered [in 2016] by a right-wing extremist."

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Campaign work was also carried out in Glasgow, Scotland, ahead of a public meeting to discuss the central issues in the general election and the SEP's programme. Although the SEP is not standing a candidate, campaigners discussed with students at the City of Glasgow College and Glasgow University. Hundreds of statements in defence of Julian Assange were distributed to considerable interest.

Attend SEP general election public meetings:

No to austerity, militarism and war!

Free Julian Assange!

For class struggle and socialist internationalism!

Manchester

Tuesday December 3, 7 p.m.

Friends Meeting House

Mount Street, M5 2NS

Glasgow

Wednesday December 4, 7 p.m.

Premier Inn, George Square

187 George Street

G1 1YU United Kingdom

London

December 8, 2 p.m.

Indian YMCA

41 Fitzroy Square, W1T 6AQ

(nearest Tube: Great Portland Street)



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wsws.org/contact