

“You are the luckiest generation in history because you have the opportunity to change the world”

Warm reception for SEP candidate Chris Marsden at Sheffield student meeting

Our reporter
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Last week, Socialist Equality Party candidate for parliament Chris Marsden won sustained applause from a packed audience at King Edward VII School in Sheffield, England.

The school had invited the candidates standing in Sheffield Central constituency to speak at a hustings attended by over 200 students aged 16-18. Other candidates attending spoke for the Labour Party, the Greens, the Conservative Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Yorkshire Party.

The young audience clearly held generally left-wing views and were largely hostile or indifferent to what the Tory, Liberal Democrat and Yorkshire Party candidates had to say. There was applause for some of the reformist measures outlined by the Labour and the Green Party candidate on occasion, but Marsden won some of the warmest responses.

No photography was allowed in a school building.

In his opening remarks, Marsden thanked the school “for the opportunity to address an audience of this generation, the unluckiest generation of the post-war period, going out into the world and getting an education under conditions where the jobs market is terrible, wages are declining, zero hours contracts have become the norm, where there is a huge climate crisis. The world is enflamed by nationalism and the development of right-wing movements.”

“Many serious problems confront your generation. But you are also the luckiest generation in history because you have the opportunity to change the world.”

Marsden explained that the SEP was a socialist party, the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky. The problems confronting the world did not lend themselves to easy solutions. “The political and economic system is in a state of complete political collapse, decay, dysfunction, it has to be replaced. Socialism is not about making a few small reforms, it is about implementing a system based on production for

need not profit on a world scale, in which there is an end to exploitation and oppression and the development of a truly humane society.”

Following two-minute opening remarks by all the candidates, students posed questions, beginning with, “What would your party do to counter the climate emergency?”

Marsden said the climate crisis was a serious one, which could not be reversed “on the basis of lowering consumption.”

“The climate crisis has not been created because people go on foreign holidays. It is being created because industry is completely unregulated, a mass polluter. You can only answer this on a global scale.”

Marsden insisted the climate emergency could not be solved within the profit system. While the SEP supported any progressive reforms addressing the climate emergency, “such measures would be defied by governments, such as that of Donald Trump, and they will be defied by multinational corporations, which are driven by one thing alone—profit. We have to take over the running of the world and make it serve the interests of millions and billions and not a tiny handful of oligarchs and super rich criminals.”

Marsden’s call for a global socialist solution was greeted by sustained applause, whereas the timid remarks of the Green Party were met with silence.

Asked “What would your party do to tackle unemployment and inequality in Sheffield?” Marsden noted that the SEP was dedicated to the struggle for social equality. “We are an international party. There is no policy for Sheffield, for the ‘jobs market.’

“We will soon likely be entering into the second major slump since 2008, which will wipe out billions and billions from the world economy.” While governments had “pumped billions into the coffers of the major corporations, vast amounts of money backed by nothing, workers have suffered

the biggest decline in wages in the post-war period.

“There are no guarantees of employment; there is no future under this system. When the crash comes, which it will, whether it is precipitated by Brexit or not, there is going to be such social dislocation that it will demand really serious answers.” Marsden appealed to the audience, “Take over industry, take over services and run them in the interests of the vast majority of the population and not the profits of the major corporations.”

In response to the question, “What will be the benefits of your solution to Brexit?” Marsden stated, “The Brexit referendum was the biggest fraud ever perpetrated,” earning the loudest applause of the meeting. “It is a reactionary mess created by two sets of right-wing politicians advocating pro-business policies—either an alliance with Europe in a trade war or an alliance with the United States in a trade war. Everybody else is going to suffer.”

“There is nothing progressive in Brexit, there is nothing progressive in that vote, there is nothing progressive in the European Union. The European Union has imposed massive austerity on Greece, Portugal, Italy, Spain. It is attacking migrants. There is no answer other than the United Socialist States of Europe, which has to be an independent initiative by the working class, not big business.”

One questioner pointedly addressed the Liberal Democrat representative, asking if the £50 billion they claim would be saved from halting Brexit would go on getting rid of student tuition fees. He was recalling that the party had raised these when in coalition with the Tories (2010-15), despite promising the opposite.

Following an embarrassed mea-culpa from the Liberal Democrats, Marsden said. “Education is a basic right and should be free. It is a social good, without it there is no progress. What the Liberal Democrats under Nick Clegg proved is that politicians lie and can’t be trusted. The only people that can defend free education is the working class... There can be no retreat on this issue.”

Another questioner asked about the candidates’ “ideas to stop the UK’s assistance of international human rights violations, whether by the support of dictatorships, or the UK’s sale of weapons?”

Marsden replied, “Britain doesn't just support repressive regimes. Britain is a repressive regime. Britain has launched imperialist wars all over the planet. It destroyed the Middle East with the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya. It is responsible for untold suffering the world over. This is a country moreover that, at this moment in time, has got the founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, who is being targeted by Donald Trump because he exposed war crimes, locked up in a maximum security prison, after which they intend to ship him to America to face 175 years in prison.”

The other parties on the platform were saying nothing about this “because they are complicit in the crimes of US imperialism. They will continue being complicit in these crimes.”

Many other candidates had expressed the opinion that supporting Saudi Arabia was morally wrong. Marsden said that UK governments have supported Saudi Arabia “because they want the oil in the Middle East” and was met with loud applause.

In reply to a closing question about how to overcome the “lack of trust in politics,” Marsden pointed to the rest of the platform saying, “Not trusting these parties is the beginning of political wisdom. Well done!”

“You can’t trust in parliament because parliament represents the ruling class and is populated by parties that represent the ruling class. Anyone who tells you they have a common interest with you is lying to you. We live in a society divided by classes. There must be a party for the working class that fights for socialism. And one final point, that is not party political. Everyone here should fight for the freedom of Julian Assange!”

Following the meeting, one student approached Marsden on the platform and congratulated him on an “inspirational speech.” Several students asked to take a photo with Marsden and others stayed behind for a considerable time to discuss the perspectives of the SEP—including a long discussion on Julian Assange and the bogus allegations made against him in Sweden. Marsden noted that the school’s motto, “Do right, fear nothing,” should be embraced by all their generation.



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