

Socialist Equality Party used UK general election to put forward a socialist perspective

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) stood candidates in Sheffield Central, Holborn and St Pancras in London and Manchester Central to urge the adoption by workers and youth of a socialist and internationalist perspective and the building of a new leadership.

The campaign led by Chris Marsden in Sheffield, Thomas Scripps in London and Dennis Leech in Manchester reached thousands and was followed across Britain and internationally.

The SEP's election statement "No to austerity, militarism and war! Free Julian Assange! For class struggle and socialist internationalism!" explained that "A Corbyn Labour government would do nothing to end the suffering inflicted on millions of working people, because this demands a frontal political assault on the major banks and corporations."

Its critique of Jeremy Corbyn's record in office in capitulating to his Blairite right wing and refusal to wage any struggle won support particularly among young people and also a sympathetic hearing among workers who said they would still vote Labour as the best means of preventing a Conservative government led by Boris Johnson.

This argument was already discredited and weakened by Corbyn's rotten record and many workers will now have occasion to rethink their attitude to the issues raised by the SEP, including its position on Brexit.

The manifesto warned against the dangerous divisions fostered in the working class by the 2016 referendum on European Union (EU) membership. It explained, "The conflict over Leave and Remain is between rival right-wing factions of the ruling class over how best to protect the interests of British imperialism." It sought "to mobilise the working class to take power in a United Socialist States of Europe that can utilise the vast resources of the continent to meet the needs of all its peoples."

The SEP made the fight for the freedom of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange a central pillar of its campaign and called for the broadest mobilisation in his defence. As the statement explained, "Assange is being punished for

exposing war crimes, as a warning to others to keep quiet. Yet neither Corbyn's Labour Party nor a single trade union has lifted a finger in his defence. Nor have any of Britain's pseudo-left groups."

These were the issues raised at hustings in which SEP candidates spoke.

SEP National Secretary Chris Marsden spoke at King Edward VII School at a hustings attended by around 200 students. He won support for the SEP's programme addressing a young audience who were "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." But, he continued, "you are also the luckiest generation in history because you have the opportunity to change the world."

Marsden answered questions on the climate crisis, raging social inequality, Brexit, and British imperialism's human rights violations. He concluded, calling for all assembled to fight for Julian Assange's freedom.

Marsden was also invited to a hustings at the Madina Masjid mosque in Sheffield, called primarily to discuss the desperate situation facing working people in Kashmir and Palestine. He denounced the media blackout over the brutal and sustained repression in Kashmir and explained its origins in inter-imperialist conflict. "Kashmir has been a terrible victim of the partition of India on religious and communal lines; it has never enjoyed any sustained period of peace. But there is something else about Kashmir now. It is standing in the way of a conflict between India and China, with India working in alliance with the United States. No one will condemn it, no one will raise a protest against the terrible treatment of the Kashmiris, because Kashmir is a victim of the most dangerous geopolitics, the kind that could end in a world war."

Marsden warned, "We are on the cusp of the most dangerous period the world has ever seen. The working class

must mobilise against that." He explained "the struggles in Kashmir must be united with the struggles of the Palestinians. They must be united with the struggles of suffering humanity all over the world, for a system based on production for need, not profit."

Thomas Scripps spoke at a hustings organised by the Council of Somali Organisations in Britain. He was given a friendly reception and explained, "Perhaps nowhere else is the failure of capitalist society clearer than in the vicious treatment of migrants and refugees the world over, on a planet with enough wealth and resources to provide for everyone."

Both Remain and Leave factions of the ruling class opposed the rights of migrant workers, he said. The Leave faction is "steeped in Islamophobia" and were seeking an alliance with far-right US president Donald Trump, while the Remain faction upheld the European Union's "Fortress Europe" policy, responsible for thousands of deaths at Europe's borders.

Scripps called for Julian Assange to be freed and noted that among the issues exposed by WikiLeaks was "US involvement in the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006, and the continued criminality of drone strikes and CIA operations throughout the country."

Responding to questions on Corbyn's Labour Party, Scripps drew attention to the London Conference on Somalia in 2017, which planned for a massive imperialist military expansion in the Horn of Africa. "These plans are not for the protection of the Somali people. They are to be used to back one section of the Somali elite or the other and dominate the region... As for Labour, Labour is the party of the Iraq war."

Dennis Leech addressed a hustings meeting organised by the Salvation Army in Manchester. He noted Labour's record as the ruling party in local government in all the predominantly working-class areas nationally, where it has slavishly imposed austerity for over a decade, a policy that continued seamlessly under Corbyn's leadership since 2015. "Under central government and a local Labour council, Manchester has become a haven for those who want to make vast amounts of money in property development and speculation." By contrast, 50 homeless people died on Manchester's streets in 2018 alone, said Leech. "A Corbyn-led Labour government," he warned, "will do nothing to end the suffering of millions of people who are facing austerity."

Leech noted the role of the constituency's Labour MP, Lucy Powell, who voted for the bombing of Syria—after she and other Blairite MPs were allowed a free vote by Corbyn—and was one of 100 MPs who signed a letter calling on Home Secretary Sajid Javid to "champion action that will ensure that Julian Assange can be extradited to Sweden."

The SEP's campaign concluded with an in London on December 8, which featured all the SEP candidates along with speakers from the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). National Secretary of the Parti de l'égalité socialiste in France, Alex Lantier, joined the meeting online.

Bringing greetings from the ICFI, Peter Schwarz spoke on the significance of the attack by the German intelligence apparatus on the ICFI's German section, the Sozialistischen Gleichheitspartei (SGP). The Verfassungsschutz' actions recall the anti-socialist laws of Bismarck, which banned the Social Democratic Party from 1878 to 1888 and the ban of the German Communist Party and Social Democrats by the Nazis. Schwarz explained that the attack was not only aimed against the SGP but expressed "in pseudo-legal form the ferocious hostility to socialism—rooted in a fear of mounting working-class discontent and its political radicalization—that is fuelling the efforts to legitimize fascist ideas."

Concluding the rally, Chris Marsden warned, "The British ruling class is preparing for counterrevolutionary violence against the working class, not a new period of social peace and 'national unity' under Labour..."

"Workers will, sooner rather than later, be forced to fight back, joining the movement now unfolding across the world. They will look for a party that is ready to fight and has the answers they need."

The SEP's campaign was covered by the London School of Economics Student Union magazine, the Beaver which ran an extensive interview with Thomas Scripps and the *Manchester Evening News*, which published a candidate statement by Dennis Leech. Manchester Metropolitan University Students' Union circulated answers from Leech to several questions it posed to candidates to tens of thousands of students who attend the university.



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