

Haltemprice and Howden by-election

Britain: Socialist Equality Party campaign wins support for Chris Talbot's stand against David Davis

By our reporters
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Chris Talbot is the candidate of the Socialist Equality Party in the by-election in the constituency of Haltemprice and Howden in the East Riding of Yorkshire, England.

The by-election on July 10 was triggered by the resignation of sitting Conservative MP David Davis in protest at government "anti-terrorist" legislation enabling police to detain suspects for up to 42 days without charge.

Over the weekend, SEP members and supporters campaigned in the villages of Cottingham, Willerby and Brough. A team also campaigned in the market town of Beverley, which is part of the neighbouring constituency. The team distributed hundreds of copies of the SEP election statement, advertising an Eve of Poll meeting to be held in the Cottingham Civic Hall on July 9 at 8pm.

In spite of heavy rain, many workers and young people stopped to discuss with the SEP campaigners in Cottingham during the village's annual fête.

Some expressed their disgust at David Davis's attempt to portray himself as a champion of democratic rights. One worker pointed out that Davis accepts the right of the state to lock someone up for 28 days without any charge.

A helper at the fête came over to the stall for a leaflet. She told the SEP: "My neighbour says we are going in a Hitler direction where all personal freedoms and rights are being taken away. They lock you up for 42 days; in the meantime you lose your job, your income and gain a criminal record. We are becoming one of the most monitored societies in the world. I agree with the stand you are taking."

Another local resident said he was "glad to see a socialist candidate standing". He was "shocked and disgusted" that former Labour MP Tony Benn had given his backing to Davis. He said he would read the SEP website and find out more about the party.

A student from Wyke College in Cottingham said she agreed with the stand of the SEP: "The reasons all these

attacks are taking place are because it's all about capitalism. There is something very wrong with a society that doesn't allow children to be treated as children and criminalises them from a young age."

Lynn Martin is a nurse at the local Castle Hill hospital. She told the campaign team, "We've been sold down the river by the Labour Party. The promises that have been made by the government have not been followed up, everything is getting more expensive.

"They don't cater to working-class people. They are more for the rich people and to keep them rich. Even though I have worked since leaving school, I know that I will not get a decent pension. I think you have got to vote for somebody who can support ordinary working people.

"My daughter attends Croxby Primary School, and it's over a year since the floods and they have only just got back to normal. At the time the hall was destroyed. Computers for which the school had raised half the money were lost, as was all the work of the children. For over a year the children have had to work in portakabins [temporary class rooms]. In spite of the children's education being disrupted, the school had to fight very hard to get the money in order that they could move back in."

Later that afternoon, the team spoke to Maria, 29, from Bulgaria. Maria said, "I have been here for one year. I am a qualified teacher but had to come here to earn money for my family. For the last year I have been a cleaner and earn more in one month than my mother, who is a tailor, earns for half a year!

"Since Bulgaria went into the European Union, the situation has got worse. Prices are very high. Electricity and gas has gone up massively but wages have stayed at the same level. My mum's wages are only enough for the bills nothing else. In 2004, I qualified as a teacher but could not find a job so I had to come to Britain."

Later that afternoon, canvassing voters door-to-door in Cottingham, an elderly worker told the SEP, “You’re the first party that has actually come to speak to me about this election”.

Another resident said that she did not believe that legislation was justified to hold anyone for 42 days without charge. She added, “I’m disgusted with Labour, but I’m hostile to David Davis and I don’t think he represents working people”.

In the town of Beverley, the SEP spoke to a resident who described himself as a socialist. He said he now thought that Labour was a capitalist party and had betrayed the working class. He told the SEP team that he had read the party’s election statement the previous week and agreed with it, but wondered how a vote would change the situation.

The SEP also campaigned in Willerby, a few miles to the south of Cottingham. The Conservative Party branch is based in Willerby, which has a population of just over 8,000. During the campaign, a woman approached the SEP campaign team and said, “Three people live in my house including my son, who is voting for the first time”. She said, “We are all reading everything very seriously” to do with the by-election.

Much of the constituency of Haltemprice and Howden is located in rural areas. There is one major industrial centre, Brough, where there is a BAE Systems factory. The plant has manufactured the Hawk fighter plane for some 30 years and is the largest employer in the East Riding with 2,000 workers.

On April 3, BAE announced that it would shed nearly 600 jobs between its Brough plant and its factory at Woodford, near Manchester in the north-west of England. Some 450 jobs are to be slashed at the Brough plant—nearly a quarter of the workforce. The jobs are to be lost among engineering, manufacturing and business support employees.

The cuts follow BAE losing a large contract in October to supply the United Arab Emirates with 35 Hawk 128 Advanced Jet Trainer fighter planes.

SEP campaigners also canvassed voters in Brough on July 6. A female resident said that “There is nothing to do for local youth and that it is hard for them to get work. They used to be able to get work at the local British Aerospace factory and in the greenhouses, but these jobs are hard to find now”.

Although she initially blamed foreign workers for the lack of jobs being made available to people in Brough, after discussing with the SEP she accepted that it was the policies of big business to use cheap labour in this country, or to move production overseas to maximise profits, that was the cause of youth unemployment.

Another resident said he had lived on the estate for 30

years and that he could remember “hanging around the local streets with my friends”. His two sons used to do that until recently. But now, when his sons and their friends are out or returning from the local youth club in groups they are dispersed by the police. The government is demonising young people, he added, and promoting the “hoodie stigma”.

He said he was a socialist and was interested in the points that SEP campaigners made. He said he would read the manifesto and pass on a copy to his friend who had been sacked from his job for being an active trade unionist.

Another resident, who disagreed with the government’s policy of detention without charge or trial, said there was “no-one to vote for who represented the working class”. He said he was interested in what the SEP had to say.

A sales administrator employed in Hull told the SEP that she had considered voting for Davis in the election. The SEP campaigners explained that Davis did not represent the interests of working people, and that his campaign was not based on a genuine defence of democratic rights. She said “There had to be a change sometime” as “things could not go on as they were”.

Basics such as bread and milk were becoming too expensive to buy, she added, asking, “Can these prices keep going up? The other day I went out and bought £20 worth of shopping and when I got back I couldn’t see anything there at all in my bags. Are the supermarkets just raising their prices in order to keep in profit?”

She said she may vote for the Socialist Equality Party, adding “You have to tell the truth to people. These MPs will say anything and then just look after themselves. I saw that they have just voted to maintain their expenses.”

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