Socialists contest Glasgow Council By-election

The Scottish Socialist Party is standing George MacDougall in a Glasgow Council by-election, *writes Mike Picken*.

The by-election in the Linn Ward, on the south east edge of Glasgow, takes place on Thursday 17 November and is caused by the death of a Labour councillor, Malcolm Cunning, a former leader of the Labour group reelected only in May.

At the heart of the Linn ward is the vast Castlemilk area – a remote housing scheme/estate established in the post-war period. At a well attended SSP election meeting on 8 November in the heart of Castlemilk, socialist candidate George MacDougall explained that poverty is a massive challenge in Castlemilk, particularly due to its remoteness and lack of infrastructure with few shops or cultural facilities, no rail station and a poor and expensive bus service. Housing standards are varied but some older tenements are afflicted with inadequate insulation and damp. George has lived in the area and explained that it had a strong community ethos with a previous local group, Castlemilk Against Austerity, campaigning for improvements and standing independent candidates in the elections with some success. During its successful early period twenty years ago the SSP won around 13% of the vote in Castlemilk.

The SSP campaign is focussing on the need to unite working class communities against the Tory UK government and point out the inadequacy of the response of parties in the Scottish Parliament – SNP, Labour and Green. SSP Industrial Organiser, Richie Venton, told the public meeting that the SSP demands were to “End Fuel Poverty” by cutting energy bills and calling for the nationalisation of the entire energy system. Venton explained that the SSP demanded a ‘Socialist Green New Deal’

that involved challenging the Tory government at Westminster and demanding the Scottish Parliament and Scottish councils campaign for a massive insulation programme with retrofitting of working class homes, combined with a move to clean green energy, an end to fossil fuel extraction and free public transport to end reliance on private cars and reduce pollution. While these demands are massively popular across Scotland, none of the parties in the Scottish Parliament are prepared to confront the Tory government at Westminster to get them implemented.

The SSP also called for massive solidarity with those workers currently struggling against the Tory wage cuts and cost-of-living crisis. A highlight of the public meeting was a speech by Gordon Martin, the RMT union Scottish Organiser. The RMT has been leading the battle across Britain to defend wages through strike action on the railways. Martin explained that although the strike action had been temporarily suspended following recent developments by the Rail Delivery Group employers, the RMT was still committed to a further ballot for strike action in the event of no reasonable inflation-matching offer on pay and conditions coming forward. Also addressing the meeting was Melanie Gale, an NHS nurse and workplace representative of the GMB union. She spoke about the struggle in the health service for decent pay and welcomed the likelihood of industrial action by the RCN and other unions (two small health unions in Scotland had already voted for strike action, while the RCN Scotland confirmed on 9 November they had also voted for strikes). Melanie demanded the SNP/Green government in Holyrood put their money where their mouth was and come forward with a pay offer that matches inflation.

The by-election takes place under the transferable vote system used in Scottish councils, so there is no question of the SSP ‘splitting’ the left or pro independence vote. There are nine candidates in the by-election, including not just the five

parties at Holyrood (Labour, SNP, Green, LibDem and Tory) but also the Alba Party, a largely reactionary splinter from the SNP, and the ultra conservative UKIP and Freedom Alliance parties.

This by-election marks a welcome return by the SSP to contesting elections and providing a voice for working class politics of solidarity, socialism and environmentalism. While it is unlikely to make a major breakthrough in terms of numbers of votes at this stage, as the SSP has not stood in an election in the area for 12 years, the SSP campaign focusses on key class issues of the day. To help the SSP election campaign use this form to contact them.



Gordon Martin, RMT Scotland organiser addresses SSP election meeting in Castlemilk, 8 November