

Socialist Equality Party candidate Tom Scripps speaks at London hustings

Our reporters
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Socialist Equality Party general election candidate Tom Scripps spoke at a hustings on Monday evening in London's Holborn and St Pancras constituency. Scripps is challenging Labour leader and warmonger Sir Keir Starmer in the seat.

The hustings was organised by the Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association (CADFA) at the Café Palestina. CADFA's mission is "to promote awareness about the human rights situation in Palestine." It was established after 2003 when a group in Camden made links with people in Abu Dis, a town in the Jerusalem suburb.

All 12 candidates were invited to the hustings. The genocide defender Starmer predictably chose not to attend. But in an affront to the basic democratic right to allow the electorate to hear different political views, none of the candidates of the other main parliamentary parties, or several standing as Independents, participated.

Scripps therefore debated Andrew Feinstein, a former African National Congress MP and campaigner against corruption and the arms trade. Feinstein is standing as an Independent but is a supporter of the "Collective" group formed last month by supporters of former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, which bases itself on the five demands of Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project: a pay rise for all, green new deal with public ownership, housing for all, tax the rich to save the NHS and welcome refugees in a world free from war.

Describing the bloodbath of the Palestinians, Scripps explained, "This is a genocide; it is a second Nakba.

"The fascist Israeli government's intention is to turn Gaza into a military-run wasteland—and they are using massacres, extrajudicial murder, torture, forced removals, starvation." Netanyahu and the IDF also seek "the dispossession and removal of as many Palestinians in the West Bank as possible, under conditions of a permanent and barbaric occupation—in alliance with far-right settlers.

Scripps warned of a regional war, with plans "for a major assault on Lebanon" and "also against Iraq and Syria—ultimately targeting Iran...

"All of this is backed to the hilt by the imperialist powers,

with the UK government in the front rank, who are ruling against the will of their populations who they are slandering as antisemites and threatening with arrest and imprisonment for using their democratic rights to oppose war crimes."

Scripps explained the connection between the war of extermination in Gaza and NATO's war against Russia, stating that "the involvement of the imperialist powers is closely bound up with the spiral towards a world conflict between the imperialist camp led by the US and its chief rivals, Russia and China, to which Iran is a stepping stone."

He said of the mass opposition to war which had erupted in response to the genocide in Gaza that what was required was a reckoning with the leadership of the protests, who are leading them into a dead end "of moral appeals to the government and the Labour Party". This "avoids the necessary total break with Labour, including the so-called 'left' flank of the Labour Party, which is out now campaigning for a Starmer victory."

These forces "seek to create either a protest vote, as a pressure tool, or at best a sort of lobby group in parliament which will act as Labour's conscience.

"Much of this is summed up in the figure of Jeremy Corbyn, whose retreats before the antisemitism slanders of his supporters and before the Blairite warmongers paved the way for the Zionist slander campaign now being mounted against millions of protesters...

"We're standing to fight for a different, socialist strategy—one that is based on mobilising the international working class in a struggle against war and the imperialist powers."

Whereas Scripps identified himself with the SEP and a revolutionary socialist programme, Feinstein put himself forward always as an individual crusader for social justice, against racism, and in defence of the Palestinians. He stressed his opposition to apartheid in South Africa but did not identify with his group's call for a new Corbynite party. His was a commitment to "the people" of Camden and an opposition to parties telling said "people" what to do.

Scripps insisted that Trotsky's theory of Permanent

Revolution was the essential theoretical and programmatic basis for ending the oppression of the Palestinians, as part of the struggle for world socialism and the overthrow of capitalism.

He warned that “NATO is speaking repeatedly about its readiness to use nuclear weapons. Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO Secretary General, just gave an interview today to the *Telegraph* talking about how more missiles were being brought out of storage and being prepared for use.”

“There are fundamental interests at stake for these powers in the conflict with Russia, which they encouraged, which they provoked, which they want. Because they want to use it as a way of grinding down the Putin government—which we oppose entirely from a socialist standpoint—as a way of collapsing the Russian Federation and ensuring a very lucrative process of regime change. That’s essential for what they see as the fundamental conflict of this era—and they use these terms—which is the conflict between US imperialism and China.”

The SEP was standing against Starmer “to use this as a platform to raise the alarm, to raise these questions among politically concerned individuals like yourselves and say, ‘you’ve got to start taking your stand on these major questions and world issues’.”

Feinstein’s response to Scripps’ exposition of the crisis of the capitalist system as the source of war, and Trotskyism as the only perspective offering the working class a viable revolutionary perspective, was to descend into sophistry:

“Tom and I, while we probably have certain theoretical and analytical differences, certain slightly different opinions about certain individuals, the role of the trade unions and their functioning over the recent times, where I think we’re probably very close to each other is that we see the root of all of these problems is the transnational system. Of late neo-liberal capitalism and the imperialism that is the inevitable accompaniment of that.

“So I’m not going to go into that sort of theoretical and analytical base. Simply to say that I do feel... the only way that we’re going to reform our politics” is “by fundamental structural change to the nature and functioning of our society and our politics.”

What this translates to is that Feinstein supports Corbyn’s bankrupt programme of minimal reforms, defends the trade union bureaucracy, and is opposed to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and division of the world into rival nation states, which twice plunged the world into a catastrophe in the 20th century—and threatens to do so again.

This was confirmed in the opposed responses of Scripps and Feinstein to a member of the audience who asked for a “practical strategy and ways forward” given the situation “we’re likely to be in in three weeks’ time” of a Starmer-

led Labour government.

Feinstein kept his reply largely to the confines of Camden and said that if elected he would be accountable to the local electorate.

Scripps urged the building of a revolutionary party. He explained that Corbyn’s refusal to fight the Blairites “played out in how the antisemitism campaign witch-hunt was allowed to run right through the Labour Party, played out in retreats made by Corbyn and the leadership over the Trident weapon system, membership of NATO, and by the order to Labour councils to impose austerity measures... The antisemitism witch-hunt is an example of what happens when you do not stand on principles and wage a political fight against your opponents.”

The issue facing millions was not a lack of determination to fight but that workers don’t have their own socialist party. He noted of the strike wave that erupted in Britain in 2022-23, “That shows there is a sentiment for a fight in the British working class”, but these strikes were betrayed by the trade union bureaucracy—“a downpayment on the part of the trade union leaderships for the partnership they would like to run with a Starmer Labour government.”

“There have to be rank-and-file organisations formed in neighbourhoods to oppose austerity measures and the cutting of services, in workplaces to organise strike activity, not just nationally, but internationally, because we confront transnational organisations, to prevent this continuous erosion of living standards.” A working class movement had to be built to oppose “genocide in Gaza and the danger of regional wars and a world at war...”

“What is the thread that ties all of that together? It is a revolutionary party. A genuinely socialist party.

“You have to have educated and engaged workers and young people. In every sphere of life, you can wage a fight for a clear and common world programme that is resolutely anti-imperialist,” so that the working class “can take on and overthrow these absolute criminals.”

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