

Socialist Equality Party general election candidate Tom Scripps wins support at Westminster Kingsway College hustings in London

Our reporters
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On Wednesday, Socialist Equality Party general election candidate Tom Scripps spoke at a hustings at Westminster Kingsway College in King's Cross, London.

Scripps is standing in the Holborn and St Pancras constituency against Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer. The last place this warmonger would want to be was at a hustings of young people, so Labour sent local councillor Liam Martin-Lane to the hustings.

Such is the widespread contempt in which Starmer is held by students for supporting Israel's genocide of the Palestinians that Martin-Lane could not even mention his name—alluding instead to the possibility that “you potentially”, “will be electing the MP who will go on to be prime minister of this country”.

Also attending the hustings were candidates from the Liberal Democrats, the right-wing, anti-immigrant UK Independence Party (UKIP), the Greens, as well as Independent candidate Andrew Feinstein.

Candidates gave an opening statement of five minutes. Scripps, placed fifth in the speakers list, told the around 100 students in attendance:

I'm standing for the Socialist Equality Party. We're in this election to oppose the genocide in Gaza and the support given to it by our [Conservative] government, which would be continued by a Labour government.

The leader of the Labour Party and the MP for this constituency, Keir Starmer, justifies this slaughter, which has claimed the lives of 14,000 Palestinian children already, in the name of Israel's “right to defend itself”.

The Labour, Lib Dem, UKIP and Green candidates had said nothing about Gaza, and Scripps' comments were met with loud applause.

He continued:

We are also standing to warn workers and youth that the war in Ukraine is threatening to rapidly develop into a direct war between the NATO powers and Russia.

The NATO powers are using the Ukrainian people as cannon fodder in a fratricidal conflict which they hope will cripple Russia and create an opportunity for a lucrative process of regime-change.

And they are prepared to go further.

NATO's leaders are planning sending troops to Ukraine, have authorised missile strikes on Russian soil and are now discussing

the use of nuclear weapons.

Just this week, NATO's general secretary, Jens Stoltenberg, said that NATO was in “live consultations” about taking nuclear missiles out of storage for potential deployment against both Russia and China.

Scripps warned the students, “Workers and young people will be made to pay ever more dearly for this militarism, with round after round of austerity that has already brought society to its knees.”

To sustained applause and cheering, Scripps concluded:

The SEP is fighting to mobilise a mass socialist anti-war movement and to build a socialist alternative to the Labour Party.

Society cannot afford the super-rich oligarchy whose obscene wealth is starving the vast majority of the population of their most basic rights as human beings.

It cannot survive the struggle for the domination of the world by a handful of imperialist powers like the United States and Britain.

Young people have no future under capitalism. It must be overthrown and replaced by socialism, and for that a revolutionary party is needed: the Socialist Equality Party.

Many questions posed by students focused on opposition to the anti-immigration policies of the UKIP candidate, who stated that every problem in society is “all because of mass immigration”, including “the sewage in our rivers”.

He added, “These are real problems. We don't have the money to put them right unless we sort that out”.

Scripps responded:

People talk about the “underlying problems”. The reason that services are crumbling and wages restrained is that a billionaire class is looting society. And Labour is no answer to the anti-migrant rhetoric of the Conservatives and the parties even more to the right. Labour's opposition to the [Conservative's] Rwanda deportation scheme is that it's not a particularly cost-effective way of deporting vulnerable people. Keir Starmer, he's very proud of his idea of using a counter-terror unit to police the small boats of extremely vulnerable people whose conditions of life have been

destroyed across the world by wars sponsored by this country, by climate change caused by the major corporations in this country.

People have the right to live and work wherever they choose. If that's a problem, it's because of the massive inequality that is created in the world by countries like Great Britain and their governments.

Scripps' reply was again met with loud applause and cheers.

Replying to a question posed to the Liberal Democrat candidate on the party's trebling of tuition fees for higher education when in coalition with the Tories between 2010 and 2015, and on the crisis facing the National Health Service (NHS), Scripps said:

On the policies put forward in the manifestos of the various main parties, a word of caution... they're written by parties whose main audience is big business and the super-rich.

We're talking about redecorating a sinking ship. Nowhere is that clearer than in the NHS, which is no longer fit for purpose after being starved and carved up by privatisation, which will be massively increased by whichever government is formed after July 4. Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary, has made that very clear.

Starmar's representative said of the socialist policies advocated by Scripps that it was "very, very easy to be populist" as minority parties in offering solutions, which he described as "pre-election mania."

In response Scripps said:

The parties will talk about what is feasible and what can be done. And all of that is what is feasible and what can be done within the constraints set by the super-rich, who they are in hock to. That's what has to be challenged.

The Liberal Democrat candidate Charlie Clinton framed his party's support for war against nuclear-armed Russia as an attack on Scripps. "I do disagree with some of the comments that were made [by Scripps]", he stated.

Saying nothing about NATO's 30-year encroachment up to Russia's border, he continued:

Ultimately, it only takes one country to start a war. If Putin is going to invade Ukraine we need to be able to stand up to him... so I stand wholeheartedly behind any party that says we do need our nuclear deterrent, we do need 2.5 percent [of GDP] on defence spending.

Feinstein, a supporter of the nominally left and now expelled former leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, did not even describe himself as a socialist. He stated in his introduction, "I stand as progressive independent because I won't accept any party line."

He failed to point out that he was a member of the Labour Party under Corbyn, as Corbyn betrayed a mass movement of workers and young people who elected him on a mandate of opposing war and austerity.

Likewise, Feinstein trumpets his seven-year period in office as an MP under the African National Congress (ANC) government of Nelson

Mandela, while not explaining that the ANC has presided over staggering levels of inequality—with South Africa today one of the most unequal societies on the planet after 30 years of ANC rule. He offered only "A different kind of politics that places our community and its people at its centre."

Scripps concluded:

Your generation confronts some really major decisions. And I think they boil down to whether to resign yourself to the present distribution of power and wealth within this society and globally, with all of its consequences that you see and that are worsening. Climate catastrophe, inequality, social hardship, war, the rise of the far-right. Or whether you take up a struggle against that.

And that is very hard. It's a fight. It means fighting against war. Neither Putin nor NATO. Seeing in no government and no ruling class any salvation, any solution to the problems that confront you.

It means fighting to stop the genocide in Gaza... That means organising strikes and blockades to shut down those who are producing the weapons or any material that can be used in the mass slaughter, displacement, starvation, torture and extradition and judicial murder of innocent people, which is what is going on.

And all of those struggles require, as history has shown, a party. How do you defeat those who have all the money, who buy all the media, who have all the police forces in the world and a monopoly on violence? How do you confront that?

You confront that by getting organised. And we say by getting organised in a revolutionary party. That's why we're standing in this seat. We're standing against Keir Starmer to make the point as strongly as we can. This generation, all generations, need to make a total break with the Labour Party, which is a right-wing, war-mongering organisation. It's finished.

You have to back a new party. We're not naive. I don't think I'm going to be the MP for Holborn and St Pancras when this is over. But this gives us a platform to build our party, which is a far more important thing.

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