

# Socialist Equality Party candidate Darren Paxton meets warm response in Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire

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Teams for Socialist Equality Party general election candidate Darren Paxton are fighting to build a socialist anti-war movement, a new socialist party, and the campaign to free Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk.

The SEP has met with support on Inverness High Street from workers, young people, shopkeepers and many of the tourists who flood into Inverness in the summer months. The issues being discussed with the SEP, by residents and visitors, show profound concerns over the rapidly escalating war crisis, the rightward shift in official politics and rising social inequality.

Many people raised the worsening cost of living crisis. **Pragnesh**, a shopkeeper and supermarket worker, commented:

“I started a business in the Highlands, in September 2020, and then after the Ukraine war the energy suppliers charged me 73 pence instead of 17 or 19 pence a unit. I was contracted for £300 then they were charging me £1,000-£1,200. The cost of living is higher and higher and the government is not doing anything for small businesses.”

“The UK is one of the richest countries, along with the US, France, Germany. But the present government doesn’t think about the common people who are suffering with high costs. Mortgage rates are too high. I want to buy a new home but I can’t afford one. Banks don’t give loans because the cost of borrowing is going higher and higher, interests are high at the moment. The government does not do anything.

“My wife’s uncle is living in Norway, a highly expensive country, but price increases are less. People are not spending money because their mortgages are high, £300, £400 higher every month. Labour are promising everything, this and that but I don’t know.”

Asked about the war in Ukraine, Pragnesh said, “In

Ukraine, thousands and thousands of properties are damaged, it will take more than 25 years to rebuild. They will be spending money, demolishing everything. My thinking is they will not rebuild.”

Many of the conversations have been with tourists from other parts of Britain, as well as countries including Norway, Denmark, France, Germany, Australia, the US, Switzerland, Italy, Ireland and Egypt.

A graphic designer from Denmark said he was shocked about a recent demand from the Danish prime minister that all households should have three days supplies in the event of war, justified on the basis that Denmark is the “weak link” between Scandinavia and Germany in the event of war. This showed how advanced the war preparations were.

He bought a copy of the International Committee of the Fourth International’s New Year statement, “The working class, the fight against capitalist barbarism, and the building of the World Party of Socialist Revolution.” Visitors from France and Germany were shocked by the sharp rightward turn in European politics—made clear in the recent European election—as was a visitor from Switzerland who also bought the New Year statement.

Few people expressed support for any party. Of those who did, a young Liberal Democrat voter asked to know the SEP’s position on the “two state” proposal for Gaza and on NATO. A woman who was intending to vote tactically agreed that it was essential to oppose the Gaza genocide.

The campaign team also attracted a number of people from the around one thousand strong Highland Pride march held in Inverness June 22. One of those attending spoke with the SEP team over their concerns for democracy and agreed to read the SEP manifesto.

Six other candidates are campaigning in the Inverness,

Skye and West Ross-shire constituency Paxton is contesting—for the Scottish Labour Party, Scottish National Party (SNP), Scottish Greens, Scottish Liberal Democrats, Reform UK, and the Scottish Conservative and Unionists.

Given the political temper in Scotland, whose population has long voted in parties nominally on the left, most of these candidates try to tack in that direction more than their counterparts in England.

SNP candidate Drew Hendry is the incumbent MP, having been in office for nearly a decade since 2015. In that election the SNP trounced Labour, winning 56 of 59 constituencies. It reduced Labour to a single Westminster seat by advancing itself as an anti-austerity alternative to what had been the majority party in Scotland for decades.

Ever since, the SNP has proved itself no different to Labour. As Paxton pointed out in an address to constituents:

The SNP in power has gone a long way to exposing the lies used to promote Scottish nationalism. Savage local authority cuts, sub-inflation pay rises, impossible housing conditions and low wages have pitched broad sections of workers into struggle against it. And only the efforts of the trade union apparatus to divert and suppress workers' struggles, especially by dividing Scottish workers from those in England during the recent strike wave, kept the SNP in office in Scotland and contributed to keeping the UK Tory government afloat.

The SNP has had to adapt itself to huge sentiment against Israel's genocide in Gaza, with regular demonstrations in Inverness—as part of UK-wide and international protest movement—being held against the slaughter. In February, Hendry appeared on the BBC's *Question Time* advocating an immediate ceasefire against the Labour and Tory parties' then stated policy of a "humanitarian pause".

But such posturing cannot conceal the pro-war, pro-NATO character of the SNP, which, as with every main parliamentary party in Britain, supports the NATO powers to the hilt in their de facto war against Russia in Ukraine.

In March 2022, Hendry wrote on his website, ignoring the 30-year advance towards Russia's borders by NATO,

to denounce the "unwarranted invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops." He added, "It was a poignant moment in the Chamber of the House of Commons last week when the whole house, political representatives of all parties, rose to give the Ukrainian ambassador, Vadym Prystaiko, a lengthy standing ovation. It was emotional to be able to show solidarity [sic] with his nation in some small way."

Hendry has repeatedly demanded increased economic sanctions on Moscow.

He has meanwhile sought to portray himself as concerned over the decline in workers' living standards, taking on the position of the SNP's Economy Spokesperson in Westminster. But this is always couched by the insistence that the SNP has to operate on the basis of what can be afforded under its devolution settlement with Westminster.

Speaking on the BBC's *Politics Live* show amid the growing strike wave in Britain in December 2022, Hendry was asked if the SNP "would be paying workers inflation busting pay rises". He responded that nurses had been given a "higher pay offer [still well below inflation] than the rest of the UK. We'd like to do more but of course we don't have borrowing powers, we don't have financial powers".

This is a miserable attempt to gloss over the SNP's pro-business, anti-working-class agenda. The month before, the SNP's then Finance Secretary John Swinney announced £615 million of spending cuts in his emergency budget review—on top of £560 million cuts to public services just two months earlier in September. Asked if there would be any funds to give workers such as teachers a liveable pay increase, Swinney stated, "to free up more money would have ever more significant consequences and I'm not prepared to do that."



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