

# Socialist Equality Party candidate Darren Paxton speaks at Inverness Trades Council general election hustings

Steve James  
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Socialist Equality Party candidate Darren Paxton was invited to speak at a general election hustings organised by Inverness and District Trades Union Council, and held in the council chamber of Highland Council.

Paxton is standing in the Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire constituency. Six of seven candidates attended the June 24 event, including Scottish National Party (SNP) MP Drew Hendry, Labour Party candidate Michael Perera and Conservative council group leader, Ruraidh Stewart. The Liberal Democrats sent a stand in.

Apart from a passing reference by Hendry to SNP ceasefire calls, Paxton was the only candidate to even mention the genocide in Gaza, the expansion of the war in the Middle East targeting Iran and Lebanon and NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine.

Paxton noted in his introduction:

“We're standing in this election to oppose the genocide in Gaza and the support given to it by our government, which would be continued by a Labour government. The leader of the Labour Party, 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”... Workers cannot rely on the Labour Party to defend their living conditions or oppose the decent into capitalist barbarism like what we see in Gaza. Workers must build an alternative, a mass and genuinely socialist anti-war movement.”

Questions were asked by the organisers about the devolution of employment law and Health and Safety at

Work Act. Paxton used his experiences to argue for new workers' organisations:

“I am a support worker and I worked through the COVID pandemic and I can tell you that, regardless of what legislation was in place, workers' rights were not upheld here—incorrect PPE, people dropping like flies, people I was looking after dropping like flies. This is because the state would rather keep the economy open, make as much profit as possible rather than care a jot about public health or health and safety in the workplace.”

A member of the audience asked, “Brexit has been a complete disaster... What is your party's policy on rejoining the EU [European Union] and do you agree with that policy?”

Labour's candidate called for a “better balance” in relations with the EU; the SNP and Greens called for Scotland and the UK to rejoin, while the Tories and Reform defended Brexit.

Paxton warned of both British and European militarism.

“We oppose both the EU and British nationalism, as seen over Brexit and the militarism which underlies the EU. We are here today to warn of the war in Ukraine turning into a nuclear conflict that could destroy all life on earth. We should be very aware of the EU's role, especially Germany's role in trying to come forward as an imperialist power. Calling it a union is ludicrous. The capitalist powers are inherently antagonistic to each other, it's not a union. We fight for a United Socialist States of Europe, and for workers to fight for that independently and in a revolutionary manner, in opposition to all of the bourgeois forces here and in Europe.”

An audience member raised the 2010 Equalities Act and single sex spaces. Paxton opposed identity politics, which is directed against a class analysis of society, stating, “I don't think the axis of anyone's political understanding should be based on identity or gender, but I do think people should have the right to identify how they please.”

Another question from the floor raised the 2022-23 strike wave, claiming that workers had won massive pay increases and asked the candidates how they would support trade unions across the workforce. Paxton opposed this rosy view of the trade unions: “I think it's important to understand firstly where this strike wave comes from—There is a global crisis of world capitalism, and happens at the same time as the war crisis, the climate crisis, the war in Ukraine, the Gaza genocide... The issue at the moment is that not only are strikes not organised on a global basis, but even in the same building, in the same union, you have workers coming out on strike at different periods...”

“Workers need to build rank-and-file committees,” Paxton said. “This is part of our opposition to Scottish nationalism... Transnational corporations cannot be challenged on a national basis. They say, ‘If you want better wages here, fine we all go elsewhere and use cheap labour’.

“I would argue that the trade union leadership have degenerated to the same extent that the Labour Party have... Workers must be able to link up on a global basis, they must be able to bring political views into their strikes because ultimately their conditions are being attacked to pay for the war and to mint more billionaires than have ever existed in the history of the planet and create worse social inequality than has ever existed.

“So much as I agree these issues are very important, to bring them forward, it has to take global dimensions and the trade unions cannot supply that. These are nationally based organisations and a great number of their leadership are making money while workers conditions continue to plummet.

“It is necessary for workers to build rank and file committees, and coordinate their strikes on all four corners of the planet. We do have the means to do that. We absolutely have the means to do that. We have an Amazon warehouse down in Fife. Amazon has warehouses all over the world. When something

happens in Amazon it affects workers in Sri Lanka and Fife at exactly the same time. So not only is the economic crisis objectively uniting workers across the planet, but workers can coordinate globally and that is what is necessary.”

A final question was posed about overcoming voter apathy. Labour's Perera said the issue was a lack of “trust and faith” in politics.

Paxton responded, “Political parties and tendencies represent economic interests and there isn't a single establishment party that represents young people or the working class. We were speaking about workers coming out on strike. These are young people too. There is an irony to the Labour candidate, the party of the Iraq War, scratching his head about voter apathy.

“In this city right here, we have started a branch of the Socialist Equality Party and every single member is between 19 and 25, every single one. We brought forward a revolutionary analysis of the global situation without appealing to capitalist forces. I am 25. Every single day since I was born there has been a war waged under British and US imperialism and nobody is willing to criticise their pay masters.

“So that is why, when young people and workers come forward and they do oppose war and the attack on their conditions, they are just spoken back to with the same nonsense representing financial interests that are miles away from them. Workers and young people are not apathetic, they are coming forward. But they are finding a blank wall in the establishment parties. It's time for them to build their own anti-war and socialist party.”

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