

SEP candidate tells London hustings:

“Whoever forms the next government makes no fundamental difference”

Paul Mitchell
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Socialist Equality Party candidate for the London constituency of Holborn and St. Pancras in the May 7 General Election, David O’Sullivan, addressed a hustings of the Somali Youth Development Resource Centre last Friday.

The Somali community organisation is based in the Borough of Camden of which the constituency is a part. Around half of the approximately 120,000 Somali-born immigrants in the UK live in London. Most came following the breakdown of Somalia in the 1980s and the US invasion in 1993.

Somali-born migrants have the lowest employment rate among all immigrants in the UK with a third of Somali men out of work, a figure that is much higher among women and young people.

Audience members asked questions on issues including lack of housing and homelessness, Islamophobia, youth education, unemployment and absence of youth centres.

An elderly single Somali man said he had been homeless for years and had to move between family and friends to find somewhere to sleep. He had pleaded with the Labour-controlled council and Labour MP Frank Dobson but got “nothing”. Some 4,500 people are on the council’s housing waiting list.

The candidates for the Conservatives (Will Blair), Labour (Sir Keir Starmer), the Green Party (its leader Natalie Bennett) and Liberal Democrats (former Camden mayor Jill Fraser) all agreed that the best thing the questioner could do was keep “shouting” at councillors (Fraser) or get in touch with the charity Shelter (Bennett). When Bennett suggested councils should have a statutory duty to house everyone, not just the most vulnerable, Starmer and Fraser insisted it was

impossible, with Fraser declaring, “There’s no way we can house everyone.”

Starmer and Bennett made false promises to build lots more houses to meet the shortage. Bennett insisted the Green Party’s plans to build 500,000 more homes was now fully costed, after she was left floundering at the start of the campaign in what she admitted was an “absolutely excruciating” BBC interview. She had been unable to explain how her party’s plan for the new homes was to be paid for or whether the cost would be £2.7 billion, £4.5 billion or £6 billion a year.

Starmer also insisted that Labour’s house building proposals were fully costed. He complained that the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government had prevented local authorities from building social housing but failed to mention the previous Labour government had pursued the same policy.

The real position of the Greens and Labour was revealed in an exchange on the lack of youth clubs. Bennett suggested young people should ask the council for “pop-up” clubs making use of empty commercial buildings for six months or so. This worthless suggestion was seized on as a flash of inspiration under conditions in which Camden council has just announced £80 million of budget cuts.

When asked about the problems the Somali community, especially women, encounter from racial abuse, all the candidates implied it was their fault for “underreporting” them. Fraser said they should “keep complaining and reporting until the police do something”.

Having offered that advice, Labour and the Greens representatives contradicted themselves, revealing just why there is underreporting. Starmer said that, whilst

he was Director of Public Prosecutions, the number of “hate crimes” going through the courts was a “tiny” proportion of the 37,000 reported every year. Bennett wondered if it wasn’t due to lack of trust in the police before blaming the right-wing media and the “man in the pub and woman on the bus” for the rise of Islamophobia.

O’Sullivan described the candidate’s responses as “both inadequate and dishonest. Don’t listen to their promises. Look at their record.

“Decades of government promises, Labour, then Conservative and Liberal Democrat, to address the immense problems of high rents, tenants’ rights, homelessness and a grossly inadequate supply of affordable housing have never been honoured.

“All the parties are committed to further spending cuts that will dwarf anything seen so far. Whoever forms the next government makes no fundamental difference.

“That is why parliament voted overwhelmingly to rush through the Budgetary Responsibility Bill, committing all future governments to permanent austerity.”

O’Sullivan said that over 800,000 new homes will need to be built in London, just by 2021 to meet demand, but in 2014 only 18,750 new homes were built across Greater London. At the same time, a process of social cleansing has been taking place, with tenants being forced out of their homes so they can be sold off. Private housing companies have reneged on promises to include social housing, and Labour councils are sending in the bailiffs and police to enforce evictions.

O’Sullivan said the only future facing young people under capitalism was austerity at home and war abroad. Some three quarters of a million are out of work and apprenticeships pay just £2.76 an hour. The biggest employer of apprentices is the British Army, he explained.

O’Sullivan held up a copy of the pamphlet *Behind the US invasion of Somalia* and described how the rise of Islamophobia was linked to imperialism and the growth of “humanitarian” interventions.

He explained how the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices had been used to legitimise the right wing in France as President François Hollande invited the National Front leader Marine Le Pen in for talks. The same process had taken place in the UK with the

promotion of UKIP.

As soon as the discussion finished, three Somali teenagers came up to O’Sullivan to purchase *Behind the US invasion of Somalia*. Another youth told him that he was the only candidate speaking the truth.

A recording of some of the questions and O’Sullivan’s replies can be found here.

For further details visit www.socialequality.org.uk



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