

SEP candidate Thomas Scripps addresses UK Somali community hustings

Our reporters
5 December 2019

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) candidate for Holborn and St Pancras Thomas Scripps spoke to a national election meeting for the Somali community in the UK, arranged by the Council of Somali Organisations.

The November 30 meeting was attended by representatives of voluntary and campaigning organisations. The Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Green Parties and Plaid Cymru [the Welsh nationalist movement] also sent representatives. Each representative was given ten minutes to make an opening contribution.

Scripps spoke first and drew attention to the context in which many Somalis have travelled to the UK, saying, “I don’t presume to know your political affiliations, if any, in relation to Somalia; whether each individual is a first, second, third generation migrant to the UK; or what the specific motivations of that move were.

“But one way or another I’d imagine many of you are here as a result of a civil war which has raged in Somalia since the 1980s—sometimes hot, sometimes cold, but which has nonetheless claimed the lives of half a million people. A civil war which has been fuelled by the criminal interventions of the United States, Britain and the leading countries of the European Union, looking to secure strategic resources and waterways.

“And a civil war which has made exiles and refugees of over a million people.”

The SEP candidate continued, “Perhaps nowhere else is the failure of capitalist society clearer than in the vicious treatment of migrants and refugees the world over, on a planet with enough wealth and resources to provide for everyone. The main parties would have you believe that there is a fundamental division over this issue being fought out in the Brexit debate. This is a fraud.”

“The pro-Brexit faction,” Scripps went on, “is led by political forces steeped in Islamophobia who hope to refashion the UK in the model of Trump’s America. It reflects a growth in far-right politics across the world.

“But the Remain faction glorify a European Union which, in a world now holding the highest number of refugees since

the end of the Second World War, conducts its migrant policy under the title ‘Fortress Europe.’ A European Union which oversees the drowning of thousands of migrants every year, which funds detention camps in North Africa known for terrible human rights abuses, which did a dirty deal with Greece and Turkey to act as Europe’s prison guards.

He added: “We, the Socialist Equality Party, are for a united Europe, but a United Socialist States of Europe, not a collection of capitalist states which imposed savage austerity on countries like Greece and which is in discussions over creating a European Army.”

Scripps raised the SEP’s demand for the freedom of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

“Assange is being punished for doing what a real journalist should. He exposed countless war crimes, illegal acts of government surveillance and cases of corruption. Among them US involvement in the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006, and the continued criminality of drone strikes and CIA operations throughout the country.”

Scripps continued, “The treatment of Assange is meant to serve as a warning to anyone else thinking of exposing state crimes, and is a precedent for their own persecution. And it has not been seriously opposed by any party other than ours.”

In the subsequent question-and-answer period, the chair asked Scripps what he thought was the most important issue facing the Somali community. Scripps said he did not think this could be “reduced to any one single issue... What is needed is a fundamental transformation of society as a whole, not any one particular cure-all policy.

“If we take the issue from the economic base, then the employment situation facing communities across the country, the Somali community included, is appalling. We have seen the longest stagnation of pay since records began. We have a move towards forms of insecure employment. A lot has been said this evening by the other candidates about entrepreneurship. Does this refer to the increasing numbers of self-employed, three quarters of whom are in poverty?”

The SEP representative explained, “We are a party that

supports full employment, including for any migrant who wishes to come here. There aren't 'immigration problems,' in that fundamental sense. There's one global problem of class and social inequality which drives many countries into poorer standards of living, which also sees them disproportionately affected by climate change—forcing people to leave their homeland when they may not wish to. It is social inequality which is at the root of the attempts of a narrow layer, the political elite, to set communities against one another in competition for resources which are only scarce because they're monopolised by a tiny elite."

An audience member raised a health issue of concern for the Somali community, tuberculosis (TB) and diabetes, and asked about the Socialist Equality Party's position.

Scripps said, "The clearest indication of the state of health and healthcare in this country is that the growth in life expectancy has been halted, in some areas it's going into reverse, and that infant mortality is rising in one of the richest countries in the world. And the clearest explanation for why this is happening is research from the *British Medical Journal* which shows that over 100,000 extra deaths have been caused by austerity policies."

"The National Health Service," he explained, "has seen huge funding cuts and it has also suffered the effects of privatisation, with each individual service parcelled off and forced to compete to protect their budgets. We shouldn't have to be talking about a TB crisis in the 21st century, the wealth exists to fix these problems. Healthcare should be fully funded to look after all the needs of the population."

Another member of the audience asked Scripps directly, after the Labour representative had left the meeting early, "I was going to say to the Labour Party that I am a true Labour voter, but I am now questioning my decision to vote for them. Because what is their overseas policy? They never talk about overseas and what's happening to our country. ... The British government is present, but what is it that they are doing there?"

Scripps drew attention to the London Conference on Somalia in 2017, which planned for a massive imperialist military expansion in the Horn of Africa. "These plans," said Scripps, "are not for the protection of the Somali people. They are to be used to back one section of the Somali elite or the other and dominate the region ... As for Labour, Labour is the party of the Iraq war."

Scripps explained that Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's constant political retreats meant that the same predatory militarism motivated Labour's politics today as under Tony Blair.

A final question was asked about the danger of the far right.

"This is a very serious threat," argued the SEP candidate,

referring to Prime Minister Boris Johnson's naked Islamophobia, to the influence of the National Rally in France and of the Alternative for Germany (AfD). He had recently spoke at a meeting on the subject at Humboldt University in Berlin and said that the response must be a unified offensive of the working class.

Rejecting the appeals made by other candidates to various forms of identity politics, Scripps pointed to the recent General Motors strike in the US where pickets included "male, female, black, white, young and old workers," despite attempts in the American press to present these as unbridgeable divides.

Scripps received several rounds of applause for his answers. After the event, members of the audience stayed to speak about the SEP's political perspective. One person thanked Scripps for raising the Assange case, saying, "This man is a hero being persecuted for sticking to his principles. We all need to support him and not enough parties are saying anything." Two other audience members offered to stand for the SEP in a future election. Many gave their contact details and said that they would attend and bring friends to the SEP's pre-election meeting in London on Sunday, December 8.

Attend SEP (UK) London Election Rally

- No to austerity, militarism and war!
- Free Julian Assange!
- For class struggle and socialist internationalism!

London

December 8, 2 p.m

Indian YMCA

41 Fitzroy Square, W1T 6AQ

(nearest Tube: Great Portland Street)

Facebook event

The rally will be addressed by our election candidates--Chris Marsden (Sheffield Central), Thomas Scripps (Holborn & St Pancras), Dennis Leech (Manchester Central).

Also speaking will be Peter Schwarz, Secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International, and Alex Lantier, National Secretary of the Parti de l'égalité socialiste in France.



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