

SEP candidate at Kentish Town Community Centre hustings

“We are fighting for a massive movement of the working class to oppose austerity and war”

By Ajanta Silva
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David O’Sullivan, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) candidate for the London constituency of Holborn & St. Pancras in the May 7 general election, took part in a hustings held in the Kentish Town Community Centre on April 14.

The candidates for the Green Party and the Conservative Party and a representative for the Liberal Democrat candidate were also present. The event was organized by StopWatch, a campaign group calling for fair and accountable policing in the UK.

The hustings started with some prearranged questions from activists from various local campaigns, followed by questions from the audience of about 30 people. A range of social issues were raised, including the enormous number of police stop and searches (about one million a year), the detention of immigrants (some 30,000 a year, most of whom are asylum seekers), Islamophobia, the drastic cuts taking place in social services and children’s services, the treatment of those with mental health problems, local schooling provision, poverty, the housing crisis, food banks and the bedroom tax.

In reply to the question about immigration detention, O’Sullivan recalled the independent inquiry the SEP held in November 1995 into the killing of Joy Gardner, a Jamaican mother of two who died after being bound and gagged during her deportation by police and immigration officers.

He said, “I was the chairman of that Inquiry. We published a report concluding that the working class would never achieve justice through official channels. We said workers had to unite to put an end to the

system which had killed Joy Gardner and oppressed millions more. A new working class party was needed.

“There were many who said we didn’t need to overthrow capitalism or build a new working class party. They said we should put hope in the election of a Labour government. It is now 20 years since we held the Inquiry. Labour was in power for 13 of those years.

“What has happened since?” O’Sullivan asked the audience. “Over 1,000 people have died in police custody. No one has been held responsible. A million people a year are subjected to stop and search. It is not a question of reforming stop and search. It is a question of abolishing it completely.”

O’Sullivan added that migrant workers and refugees are blamed for all the problems created by austerity by all the major parties. He insisted that workers should be allowed to live and work anywhere in the world.

Answering the question of Islamophobia, O’Sullivan explained that anti-Muslim hysteria had been deliberately whipped up to divide workers and deflect attention away from the economic crisis and the drive towards war.

“The question of war has been excluded from the political debate,” he explained before warning, “As soon as the election is over, British troops are to be sent back into Iraq, while advisers are also to be sent to Syria—an open act of war.”

Placing the questions of poverty, the housing crisis and the slashing of the social gains of the working class in a broader international context, O’Sullivan said, “We are now seven years on from the financial crisis of 2008, which brought the entire global economic system

to the brink of collapse. Yet despite massive bailouts to the banks and endless austerity, nothing has been resolved.

“The financial collapse has been used by the ruling elite internationally to justify an unprecedented attack on the social conditions of the working class.

“Wages have stagnated or fallen for workers in virtually every country, especially so in Britain. At the same time, benefits have been cut. Rents are increasing. It’s virtually impossible for young people to get on the housing ladder. Some 20 million people in Britain live below the poverty line.

“All the major parties are agreed on further austerity—which will dwarf everything we have seen so far.”

An audience member asked the Green candidate, party leader Natalie Bennett, “What is the Green party’s policy on war, bearing in mind that the Green Party in Germany supported the warmongering of its own government.”

Bennett claimed that she and her party were opponents of war before admitting the Greens would “take our place in UN peacekeeping operations and [in upholding] international law”—the usual pretext used as a cover for imperialist interventions in the world. When the questioner pointed out that the German Greens had made similar anti-war declarations before reneging on them, she tried to claim that her party in the UK was different.

Bennett’s absurd cry—“We are not like the other Green parties”—has become a common refrain during this election campaign. She responded in the same way at an earlier hustings when confronted with a remark about the Irish Greens taking part in a pro-austerity coalition despite posing previously as anti-austerity.

The Conservative candidate Will Blair and the Liberal Democrat representative faced a lot of hostility from the audience when they tried to justify the war drive of the UK and the United States. Several people from the audience accused them of lying and being totally out of touch with what is actually happening to the lives of working people.

O’Sullivan said, “I agree with the audience here. After these elections there will be a renewed drive towards war. America is trying to overcome its economic decline by reckless military interventions. The same problem in the capitalist system that led to

the first and second World Wars—who controls world trade, who dominates the world economy—is leading to a third. Nothing is said about the destruction happening in Ukraine and the Middle East.”

Countering the arguments of the Conservative candidate O’Sullivan declared, “ISIL, or ISIS, is a Frankenstein monster created by American and British imperialism. The only way to oppose them is to oppose imperialism itself.

“Imperialist wars abroad mean class war at home. We are fighting for a massive movement of the working class to oppose austerity and war.”

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