

Britain: Socialist Equality Party and Greens banned from David Davis eve-of-poll meeting on democratic rights

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Members and supporters of both the Socialist Equality Party and the Green Party were excluded from a public meeting yesterday organised by David Davis on the eve of the Haltemprice and Howden by-election. The meeting at the Best Western Willerby Manor Hotel featured a platform including Labour MP Bob Marshall-Andrews and Liberty director Shami Chakrabati.

Davis's own web site said the speakers were to discuss "the modern relevance of our ancient British liberties." Yet when members of the only two parties standing against Davis whose candidates oppose Labour's anti-terror legislation arrived, stewards barred them from entry.

When asked on what basis this was being done, a number of reasons were given. Firstly, stewards said that the meeting was by invitation only and that SEP members' names were not on the list. This was an obvious lie, given that no such indication was made in Davis's advertisement for the meeting and the fact that there was no list to consult.

Barbara Slaughter, a member of the SEP, was not identified by stewards and was able to attend the meeting. Unaware of what had happened, when she was leaving the meeting Slaughter asked a steward wearing a "David Davis for Freedom" T-shirt, why some people had been stopped from going in. The steward replied that it was because "they" had been disruptive. When asked who, he replied, "The Greens and the Socialist Equality Party."

This is a lie. During the election campaign, the SEP has attended two meetings outside the constituency at which Davis spoke, a *Guardian-Observer* debate and a debate between Davis and Tony Benn. The previous evening SEP and Green Party members were present in

the audience of a debate organised by Davis at the Eastington Village Hall in the Haltemprice and Howden constituency.

The final reason given was that the meeting was reserved for residents of Haltemprice and Howden. When contacted, a spokesman for Liberty said that Ms. Chakrabati had accepted this justification and, "on that basis," had spoken on the platform.

Chris Talbot, SEP candidate for Haltemprice and Howden, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "The suggestion that the Socialist Equality Party is disruptive is a slander. I and other members have attended and spoken at several meetings organised by David Davis and other candidates in this by-election. This is a clear case of political censorship that should be condemned. The fact that the director of Liberty was on the platform of a meeting to defend civil liberties that then restricts free speech is outrageous."

Talbot was interviewed by a reporter from BBC Radio Humberside about the incident.

The reporter asked him, "When you turned up today, did you try and get into the meeting?"

Talbot replied, "Yes, and we were quite surprised to be excluded from the meeting today, and so were the Greens. In other words no other political parties were allowed in. A Liberty meeting, where candidates with political platforms were not allowed in. It is really not acceptable."

The reporter then asked, "How does it make you feel, especially when David Davis is campaigning on civil liberties?"

Talbot replied, "It means election candidates are not being treated seriously. It's not a democratic contest. Parties that are standing can't express their voice. We

have protested strongly and so have the Greens. If David Davis wants a democratic campaign he has to allow other people to put opposing views, but that has not happened here today.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* also spoke to Green Party candidate Shan Oakes. She said, “We are not surprised, because this has been the case right the way through this campaign. At the beginning, David Davis said he would invite us to events. We have been waiting for those invitations. They know the Green Party are going to ask searching questions, so they particularly make sure that we are not involved.”

Oakes also said, “When Shami Chakribati went in, I told her we were being excluded from the meeting and that she should know that she is being used by David Davis.”



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