

Britain: SEP candidate barred from hustings by Manchester University Students Union

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The University of Manchester Students Union (UMSU) barred Robert Skelton, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Manchester Central from attending its Election Candidates Questions and Answer Session last Monday.

Supporters of the SEP, including a senior member of the University's academic staff, were also prevented from attending.

UMSU had invited candidates from the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, the United Kingdom Independence Party, the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and the Green Party to address the meeting from the platform, but refused to invite the SEP, or Respect and the Workers Revolutionary Party.

The exclusion of the SEP was particularly striking. The International Students for Social Equality (ISSE), which is affiliated to the SEP, is one of UMSU's registered student societies and has held numerous meetings on campus attended by 20, 30 and sometimes over 100 students. Yet the organising committee did not even contact the ISSE about the hustings. At least one of the invited speakers has no student society in UMSU.

Furthermore, Skelton is the candidate for Manchester Central which covers Manchester's two universities. Only one of the invited speakers, the Green Party's Gayle O'Donovan, was from the Manchester Central constituency.

When, one week before the meeting, Skelton protested UMSU's original refusal to invite him, UMSU agreed to let him speak from the floor and said that they would reconsider him speaking on the platform if one of the candidates dropped out. Just before the event was due to start the Labour speaker failed to attend, leaving the previously stated spare slot

in the timetable.

When the SEP again requested the right to speak from the platform, Laura Williams, the event organiser, called the security staff to remove one SEP supporter and barred Skelton and his supporters from attending the meeting.

None of the candidates present on the platform, including the TUSC representative Karen Reissmann, publicly protested the decision to bar Skelton and others from the debate.



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