

# Socialist Equality Party overturns election hustings exclusion in Camden

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On Wednesday evening, Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaigners defeated attempts to prevent David O’Sullivan, the party’s general election candidate for the London constituency of Holborn and St Pancras, appearing on the platform of a hustings.

The hustings was organised by the Camden Climate Action Network.

In reply to an email request to allow O’Sullivan to take part, organiser, Natasha Clayton, who describes herself on Twitter as an “eco-activist tempered by accountant-style tendencies,” declared that she was only inviting parties “who expect to poll a strong proportion of the votes.”

Clayton cited thoroughly undemocratic Electoral Commission rules that allow organisers to invite or exclude candidates based on their “local prominence,” “the number of elected representatives at the local or national level,” “recent election results in the area” and “resources and other practicalities constraining numbers of invitees.”

Campaigners handed out the SEP election manifesto and a leaflet to those attending which said, “Socialist Equality Party candidate David O’Sullivan has been arbitrarily excluded from tonight’s CamdenCAN hustings.

“The reason cited by the organisers is that only those parties expected to poll a large number of votes should take part. This is undemocratic and a form of political censorship.

“Elections should be decided on the basis of an informed choice by voters, who are aware of the differences between the various parties and the record of all candidates.

“Deciding that only the views of the Green Party, the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats is of interest to the people of Camden reinforces the

domination of those with substantial financial backing.

“This is the most commonly-used mechanism to ensure that only parties and candidates whose views are acceptable to the major corporations and banks are heard.

“We appeal to all those attending tonight’s meeting to insist that David O’Sullivan is given his place on tonight’s platform and the opportunity to make the socialist case for combating climate change through the transformation of society, based on planned production for need, not corporate profit.”

The chair opened the meeting by referring to the SEP leaflet, at which point O’Sullivan stood up to raise a point of order. He introduced himself and asked, “Why have I been excluded from the platform even though I am on the ballot?”

“I would like to ask those on the platform what their views are on excluding minority parties from this hustings and political debate more broadly. In particular my question is addressed to [Green Party leader] Natalie Bennett, given that last night the Scottish Green Party protested their exclusion from the debate on Scottish Television.

“Does Natalie agree with Scottish Greens co-convenor Patrick Harvie who said, ‘With a politically engaged electorate and a decline in support for the two or three parties, it is clear that a broadcaster [and I would add the organiser of this hustings] not reflecting a broader range of voices will not meet the expectations of its audience.’

“I am asking everyone here to support my right to sit on the platform and explain my viewpoint,” O’Sullivan concluded.

The chair launched into a repetition of Clayton’s justification for excluding O’Sullivan and only inviting the four parties that he claimed had a “base” in the

constituency. At that point a member of the audience interrupted to declare, “I have never heard of this party but I find it totally undemocratic that an official candidate is not represented.”

The chair was forced to call a vote, which resulted in a large majority in favour of O’Sullivan taking the platform. Conservative candidate Will Blair and Liberal Democrat Jill Fraser raised their hands for O’Sullivan, while Bennett and former human rights lawyer Sir Keir Starmer, representing the Labour Party, abstained.

A round of applause greeted O’Sullivan as he made his way onto the stage.

Because of his exclusion, unlike the other candidates, O’Sullivan did not have the list of questions which had been submitted earlier by those registering for the meeting. Nevertheless, he was able to counter the predominant tendency of other candidates to blame individuals and their overconsumption for the problems of climate change. Bizarrely, a good portion of the meeting dwelt on the need to best ensure schoolchildren were thoroughly educated in living a sustainable, zero-carbon footprint life. It was reminiscent of the exhortations of the notorious headmaster Thomas Gradgrind in Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times*, who treated his young pupils as “pitchers” to be stuffed full of “useful” facts.

In contrast, O’Sullivan explained that any serious proposal to remedy the effects of climate change ran up against the private ownership of the means of production by a handful of capitalist billionaires and the division of the world into rival capitalist nation-states.

“It is the division of the world into rival capitalist nation-state system,” he said, “that prevents rational policy-making on climate change and other environmental issues, which must be carried out on a global basis. Instead, all the powers involved in global climate talks look at the issues from the standpoint of the interests of their own ruling class, not the survival of humanity.”

“This makes nonsense of the type of piecemeal measures within capitalism suggested by all panellists, including Natalie Bennett of the Greens. And of course none of them will say anything about the far more immediate threat to the survival of the planet and of the human race posed by the drive to war against Russia now underway and involving all the NATO powers,

including the UK.”

O’Sullivan explained how war had created an environmental disaster in the Middle East, but this was excluded from any debate. He insisted that the only way forward was the fight for a revolutionary programme, including the nationalisation of all the major corporations and banks under the democratic control of working people. This must become the starting point for the rational reorganization of the world’s economy through the international unification of the working people of all countries, the abolition of national borders and the creation of a socialist world.

Afterwards a number of audience members stayed on to talk with O’Sullivan.

*For further details visit: [www.socialequality.org.uk](http://www.socialequality.org.uk)*



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