

Zero Hour environmental campaign group bars SEP candidate Tom Scripps from election hustings

Our reporters
28 June 2024

Socialist Equality Party candidate for Holborn and St Pancras Tom Scripps was denied a place on the panel of a “climate and nature” hustings, organised by Zero Hour in London on Thursday evening.

The event was billed as “an important democratic opportunity for voters to understand their local candidates’ views on climate change and the environment,” with space for up to 400 attendees—though on the night at most 100 took seats.

The SEP was never informed of the hustings, finding out about it through online advertising. Zero Hour did not openly announce that certain candidates had been excluded. Its event page reported, “Candidates who have confirmed their attendance: Charlie Clinton (Liberal Democrat), David Stansell (Green), Andrew Feinstein (Independent), and deputising for Sir Keir Starmer (Labour), Councillor Adam Harrison, Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Camden.” This gave the impression that other candidates had simply declined to attend—as was true of the Conservative Party.

Scripps registered for a ticket and sent the organisers a message via Eventbrite Thursday June 20, explaining that he had not received an invitation and asking to be put in touch with the organisers to arrange his participation. A second email was sent to Zero Hour’s main email address on Friday June 21—the organisation does not list a contact phone number on its website. Neither message received a reply.

On Wednesday June 26, a day before the event, a follow-up email was sent, also copying in Zero Hour’s Campaigns and Press and Media email addresses, stating that Scripps would “be attending the event tomorrow seeking my right to address constituents on this issue” and asking for information on the format.

Scripps tweeted Zero Hour publicly, responding to a post advertising the event which had tagged the Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Green and Reform parties, plus independent candidate Andrew Feinstein. “I’m standing as the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate in the

constituency and haven’t been able to reach you by email. I’m very eager to take part in this event on such a crucial issue. Let me know how best to get in touch,” Scripps wrote.

With no reply by the morning of the day of the event, Scripps contacted the venue for the hustings, St Pancras New Church, asking them to contact the organisers with his request and leaving a phone number. At half past one, the SEP finally received a reply formally refusing Scripps a position on the panel:

Tonight’s hustings event aims to offer a good blend of political balance, and our plan is to run a non-selective hustings, but unfortunately could not invite all candidates. When selecting speakers, we have followed the Electoral Commission guidance for impartiality, “local prominence of some parties or candidates over others”. With this in mind, we have decided that current polling data is a good indicator of “local prominence” at this time. We have therefore followed polling data and invited only the top polling candidates. Unfortunately, this does not include the Socialist Equality Party.

Scripps replied:

I protest this undemocratic decision made by Zero Hour.

There is a clear contradiction between your stated aims of offering “a good blend of political balance” and running a “non-selective hustings” and your claim that you “could not invite all candidates.” Why? There are currently just four listed as speaking.

It is not a question of what the Electoral Commission allows you to do based on “local

prominence”, but of what is fair and democratic. The Socialist Equality Party stood for election in Holborn and St Pancras in 2019 and has waged a far more active and extensive campaign this year, speaking with and distributing our material to thousands of residents. We represent an international tendency which has contested the European elections this year and will contest the US Presidential elections.

According to your advertising, the candidate with the most “local prominence” by the polls, Keir Starmer, is not bothering to attend and speak to his constituents—among other things to defend his scrapping of climate funding pledges.

The exclusion of the SEP prevents the audience, at I think the largest hustings event organised in the constituency in this election, from hearing and asking questions of an internationalist socialist perspective.

Instead they will be left with two parties who have served in government and failed to address the issues over which Zero Hour campaigns; the Green Party, whose views and policies are well known; and Andrew Feinstein, providing him with an opportunity denied the other candidates standing as Independents or members of smaller parties: the definition of a selective hustings.

I hope you will reconsider your decision in light of these points and await your response.

Less than an hour before the hustings was due to begin, Zero Hour replied that “we have gone through a thorough decision-making process and intend to keep with our original decision... The polling data was the fairest way to decide who to invite based on local prominence, given that we could not possibly have all 12 candidates standing attend the event.”

Scripps and members of the SEP went to the venue and approached the platform before the hustings began, challenging this undemocratic decision. The organisers responded that they could not “bow to pressure at the literal starting hour” as otherwise the other non-invited candidates would complain, justifying the SEP’s exclusion by the impact of Zero Hour’s earlier decision to exclude candidates.

Scripps asked whether the other candidates had sought to attend and was told they had not but that they could say “that’s because they weren’t invited[!]” When Scripps pointed out that this problem could have been rectified a week ago upon receipt of his first email, the organisers made clear that “even a week ago” this would have been the position.

An SEP campaigner spoke with Feinstein directly to ask for his support, prompting a suggestion that Scripps could “speak from the floor.”

The SEP team took their seats. After introductory remarks made by Zero Hour and a representative of Friends of the Earth, as the chair began to introduce the candidates, Scripps stood to speak, saying, “I’d like to raise a protest at the start. I am a candidate for this constituency for the Socialist Equality Party. I have not been invited to this panel, I believe undemocratically. I have a statement prepared and views prepared to give.

“I would like to appeal to the candidates as to what their views are on this, and I would appeal to the chair to reconsider and to the meeting to support my speaking.”

There was a round of applause after Scripps spoke.

The chair responded that the organisers had “set out how they were going to organise this evening and I’m afraid that still stands. For clarity, there are twelve candidates for this election. Zero Hour as the organisers took a very reasonable decision not to have twelve candidates on the podium.”

A suggestion that the matter be put to the meeting was ignored. None of the candidates on the panel, including Feinstein, challenged the chair’s decision or backed the call for a vote.

As Scripps and the SEP campaigners left, a woman called out, “Excuse me, the Conservatives are not represented up there, and Keir Starmer’s not there; the fact that that gentleman can’t speak and is leaving is a disgrace,” drawing applause, but the panel was unmoved. Several members of the audience stopped Scripps to confirm the party he was representing.

Outside the venue, Scripps gave a short statement explaining his exclusion and denouncing the “attack on the most basic democratic rights of the electorate to hear the views of all the candidates, to hear a socialist view on how to address on the gravest crises confronting humanity.”

Scripps will be speaking alongside fellow UK election candidate Darren Paxton and representatives of the SEP in the United States, Germany and France at the Socialist Equality Party election rally being held at 2pm this Sunday afternoon, June 30. **Register to attend today.**

You can follow the SEP’s campaign here at socialism2024.org.uk

You can donate to its election crowdfunder here.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact