

Minutes of the KCSU Extraordinary Open Meeting - 20th April 2010 (UKIP Debate)

Shayan: This is a debate about whether we should be allowed to have the UKIP candidate. Constitution to be interpreted by the chair. Lots of different opinions – most democratic way is for me to bring it to the students. I'm going to open up the floor for a discussion. Either he's allowed to come, and if the chair deems anything to be too offensive, we reserve the right to stop him. That or he doesn't come at all. I'm opening up the floor for a debate. Debate ending in 35 minutes.

Hannah: Is the format of the hustings going to be asking indirect or direct questions?

Juan: Each candidate gets 2 minutes to present themselves. Submit questions to Secretary, he'll choose them. I will ask them. It can be asked to a specific candidate.

Shayan: Opening statements.

Chigbo: I don't want to talk about my personal views. I want to talk about where you guys are legally. Obligations given that an election's happening. Some legal requirements that organisations have to fall within. Representation of the Peoples act. Encouraged to show as much balance as possible. You're doing okay, you've invited a wide spectrum. Think about whether denying a specific political party is an unfair bias. I've checked this up legally – Unions and JCRs are able to, while striving to achieve balance, allowed to decline entry to any specific candidate or party who advocates policies in contravention of charities' aims, etc. You are okay with not letting any particular political party appear if you feel that they do any of those things. Contravention of objects, increasing chance of public disorder, or alienating members of King's college. Not inviting UKIP is okay within those things.

Jacob: The first thing seems to be to determine whether UKIP fall foul of what lots of you have probably got here. Our constitution says to be an organisation opposing racism, sexism, prejudice and so on and to prevent display or propagation of any material advocating prejudice. My opinion is that UKIP are racist, sexist or homophobic. If you look on the internet there are many quotes that show this. One of their MEPs has said: "No self-respecting small businessman with a brain in the right place would ever employ a lady of child-bearing age.. I am here to represent Yorkshire women who always have dinner on the table when you get home." Clear that they're misogynist. Frank Maloney won't campaign in Camden because there are too many gays there. We could go on to describe their links throughout Europe with horrific far-right organisations. King's is 30% international – by allowing them to propagate views such as putting a 5 year cap on immigration, cause trouble for international students, change the culture in which we're living significantly.

Shayan: Even if you disagree with a point, raise your hand.

Juan: Out of all the KCSU motions we've ever debated, this is the most patronising. What's the danger? Biggest danger is that someone might vote for UKIP – that's how democracy works. You give people a platform, than make a rational decision. Insult to all of you to say you're too stupid. If UKIP as misogynist and racist as people said, then you will be able to decide that for yourself. Infinitely more powerful to allow them to come here to expose how stupid they are, than to lock them out and make them into martyrs. I think it's going to be terrifically damaging to the whole spirit of the event to lock out one of the parties because we disagree with their point of view. That's not what a democracy should be about. If you disagree so much, use this as a platform to express your concern.

Lotte: I think inviting UKIP would skew the debate and make the whole hustings debate more about baiting UKIP. It'd cause more distress having them here. I can foresee that there would be a certain amount of protest if the candidate did come.

Luke: At the moment, my first thought is that Juan is talking about giving a platform to everyone – there are 8 candidates. We should invite all 8 of them. Moreover, we're not making martyrs out of the three we haven't invited.

Juan: I invited 6 candidates, the only 6 who are representing parties.

Richard Dorrell: In response to Lotte's point. Juan – I believe people have already been emailing questions. At the moment, do you think there's a problem with the number of questions directed towards UKIP?

Barnaby: No.

Aris: I disagree with what has been said on both sides. I can't see the point of going through a detailed examination of statements of members of a political party. Clearly most of us strongly disagree with them. I think that by doing this we tend to assume primacy of the other parties, naming the three big other parties – just as disgusting as UKIP. We can go through New Labour, Tory policies, just as bad. Picking out one party and saying we're not going to invite them because it'll be particularly offensive, qualitative assessment of how offensive those parties are to me. Having more voices doesn't necessarily contribute to a platform for constructive debate, but at least it lets everyone expose their flaws, strengths and so on.

Arthur: I would agree with Aris. I don't think it's useful for us to think of whether or not UKIP is morally compatible with the values of King's. The conservatives have connections with parties in the EU that are problematic. I'm not saying UKIP is better, they're worse, but that's not in itself a reason. Look at it pragmatically. Do we think their presence will substantially modify this debate, make it impossible or really shit? I don't think it's useful to evaluate them morally.

Jacob: I completely agree that there's an awful gradient, I hate most of them. The fact that loads of people say bad things, does that mean we *can't* draw a line? There is that differentiation, we have a constitution. We're all implicitly or tacitly agreeing that those things I read out were racist, etc. There is a very clear constitutional reason why we shouldn't have them.

Arthur: The argument is that the constitution can be interpreted to ban every political party, that wouldn't be constructive to the debate.

Jacob: Circular – more flagrant/less flagrant. I think the Tory candidate is awful, but I'm not going to have that argument on here. On the pragmatic basis, comes back to what Juan said at the beginning – we'll all come, realise how stupid they are, etc. Most of us here will think that – but once we've given them the platform to speak, we don't know what will happen. If they don't come, nobody can be adversely affected. If they do, people *could*. There could be a question on transport, he could say things we agree with, people nodding, legitimising his views. On many instances he has valid views, some things integrally opposed to what we are as a Union. This is the one place where we make a decision as to whether they should be in our space or not. He could speak in many different places, some of them pragmatically would be a lot more problematic. But the fact that there's loads of

culturally middle class people, etc, this is the one place where we *do* get to make the decision, whether they should be in our space. Make a principled stand.

Joseph: Have to concede that it's not our place to decide – we have to let them in, otherwise there's no decision being made.

Hugh: Don't you think people at King's have the right to decide rather than us. Some people might think they might agree with UKIP, they have the right.

Jacob: We're not saying UKIP can't stand. We're saying this is the place in which we all live and study. If somebody wants to vote for UKIP, they won't not.

Clare: It sounds like you're saying "I don't want them to come because I don't want them to come." What's the harm if they're coming to speak?

Matt: As far as I know, this man isn't the demon headmaster. People probably won't be very much affected by the hustings – your point about transport, people can see the bigger picture rather than one little picture.

Rikesh: You keep saying in the constitution, we're allowed to bar them if it goes against our aims, it goes against appendix b.

Chigbo: By not inviting a particular party, you're not persuading your students to vote for any political party.

Rikesh: If you invite every other party, not one party, that's persuading.

Shayan: The constitution can be interpreted loosely.

Louisa: It is exclusion, they've already been invited.

Nilu: It's offensive that you can sit there and think you have the right to speak, we have to listen. What if I find your views offensive, can I throw you out? No. You're not 8. I don't know what this argument is about.

Angus: The real issue – debate could get bogged down, turn into us repeatedly questioning UKIP. That's the big issue, the only real reasonable reason we should exclude them. Is there a value in saying we should only ask questions on the content of their speech or manifesto.

James Angel: Just to come back to the argument that you're clamping down, which is just as bad, that implies that we have no sense of seeing that some views are wrong. As far as I can tell, people saying UKIP shouldn't be allowed in, nothing we wouldn't think is wrong in that way.

Arthur: Can we maybe think that people who do come to those hustings, if this is an event of importance in deciding vote, you'll probably want to ask questions that'll help you decide on your vote, if you want to use power to ask whether they're racist or not. Implying that people only want to see whether UKIP are racist.

Luke: One of the important issues here is you can't have it both ways. "Everyone knows UKIP are racist, we can have a proper debate" AND "We're not going to be distracted from the main event".

You only have finite amount of time. Either you grill UKIP, or focus on wider issue of general election. This isn't the only opportunity we have to decide how to vote. If someone's really interested in UKIP, they can go out and find those views. The point is, we can decide not to invite certain people if we don't want to invite them. That's democratic.

Arthur: Aren't you trying to have it both ways? Thinking because people can make minds up usefewhere, we don't need to invite them, but that if we invite them they'll persuade them to vote for them.

Hugh: I think this debate has shown we don't like UKIP. Can we have an international student who can't vote doing a Jeremy Paxman? Can Juan just invite the other two parties?

Juan: The way that I imagined this, people submit questions to Barnaby, he chooses representative questions. No bias. This is going to happen whether or not UKIP come.

Chigbo: In Cambridge, we have 9 candidates.. 6 is the most for that sort of hustings, keep it manageable. If you need more people to help manage the debate, I'm more than happy to. 5 or 6 is as many as you can fit for that sort of event.

Aris: Why don't we disinvite the parties that will already have been exposed to the media. Disinvite Labour, Lib Dem, Tories – provide platform for alternative voices.

Juan: Point of hustings is to provide as neutral as possible a debate. To disregard three largest parties is having an anti-media agenda. That's why I invited 6 representatives of parties.

Lotte: I don't see why we should have to be neutral and unbiased towards a racist, sexist party. It'd be wrong to be neutral.

James: I agree – surely the debate should be what as a body we decide we want it to be, not what Juan wants it to be. Its being neutral was one person's decision.

Tindall: In terms of where we stand, we can legitimately say to UKIP, you're racist, we don't invite parties like that because of our constitution. Distinguish between racist party and party made up of racist individuals. Kilroy-Silk was a Labour MP when he was kicked off his talk show for being racist. All parties have people in who have such views on race, sexuality etc. They could say they don't have anything racist in their policy.

Harry Frankish: If UKIP don't have any racist policies, if candidate hasn't been quoted saying these things, then there's no reason to think that he's going to come here and promote racism, sexism etc. Constitution doesn't come into question.

Naiara Bazin: Everybody has to ask themselves – do we have something to ask them. Each one of you should think – Do I need them there to have my debate? If you have something to ask them, vote for them to be there. If you have nothing to ask, don't.

Andrew Munro: I've been through the manifesto too, and the quotations of certain members. As far as I can tell, their manifesto contains no policy under this umbrella. None of their policies are outright racist. In March 2008, KCSU and CUSU had a discussion on this, and came to the conclusion that students were intelligent enough to make up their own minds.

James Angel: I don't think the issue is that their policies do this. Putting a platform to someone who represents a party who have been racist. Bringing them to a respectable place like King's College, makes them look respectable. We shouldn't be tied down about their policies.

Jacob: If we can't judge political parties on what their members say, then on what basis are we judging them? We're judging them on what we say at the hustings. They word the policy document carefully. My last point – lots of talk about how practically we won't buy that shit. I don't think there'll be a huge swing to the right. I'm arguing on a principled basis – racism is on the rise in this country. It's getting a lot worse. We have an abstract notion of freedom of speech, more and more racism, we all accept that people are culturally determined, might become racist, they also become racist because these views are disseminated more and more and more - is there any point at which we say we don't want you to say these things because we know what happens. I'm not saying anyone here will turn into a racist –but is there a cutoff point?

Juan: I think a lot of people here are undecided. This should be about presenting the options and giving us the choice. An effective hustings is one where you have a variety of opinions. To neutralise, castrate this debate, remove political parties we don't agree with, it's not a debate. Much more interesting discussion. Even if you personally disagree with all policies, more interesting to have them here. Even if I disagree with them, I'd prefer to have them here.

Shayan: You've heard both sides. Take a vote. For: 67, Against: 12, Absentions: 3