

MEMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT

That is an excellent example of the way in which our society is systemically sexist, and why quotas are needed to address this systemic sexism. Perhaps an equal Parliament might pass legislation to ensure that 50% of head teachers are female?¹¹¹

Now to the international benefits. Currently, there are no countries in the world with equal parliaments. Imagine if Britain were to have the first equal parliament in the world. What sort of message would that send, not just to the British people, but to the people of the world?

(CHAIR knocks for four minutes.)

How much more would we be respected in the world? How much easier would it be for us to take a lead on fighting sexism and inequality around the world? Our parliament, and our government, would have greater credibility worldwide. The British Parliament is traditionally known as the 'Mother of Parliaments', but up till now it hasn't had many members biologically capable of becoming mothers. If it was the first ever equal parliament, it would truly deserve to be called the Mother of All Parliaments.¹¹²

So, I have shown you that the measure the Government proposes is not only fairer and more effective; it will also make MPs more representative, bring more women into positions of power, and will boost Britain's standing in the world. Who could not wish to support such a measure?¹¹³

CHAIR

I thank the Member of the Government for her fine speech, and call on the Member of the Opposition to reply.

MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITION

Thank you, Madam Chair.

My colleagues on the Opposition have already shown how the Government's proposed measure is undemocratic, patronising and counter-productive. I think we on the Opposition need to go further, and reach out to the Government, and say how we agree with their diagnosis of the problem. Britain is a sexist society, and this needs changing. We agree on this.¹¹⁴ However, where we disagree is regarding the solution that they propose. It is the wrong solution because it assumes that equal representation guarantees equal treatment; because it does not tackle the true roots of sexism in our society; and because it runs the risk of derailing the fight against sexism.¹¹⁵

111 This is a very adroit response to the POI, because it takes the substance of the point (even equal workplaces can be sexist) and turns it against the Opposition Whip (yes, I agree, and that is why we need a legislature that is more likely to take action against this institutional sexism). This is sometimes called the 'judo move', using your opponent's strength against them.

112 This isn't a particularly strong argument (it can be hard to avoid a sense of scraping the bottom of the barrel at this stage of the debate) and the joke at the end is a bit cheesy, but it makes a nice rhetorical flourish at the end of the speech.

113 The first argument in this speech is strong and well made; the second and third are a little lacking in substance and over-extended. However, the Member of the Government's real strength is in her handling of POIs; she deals with both brilliantly.

114 Agreeing (or rather, appearing to agree) with your opponents is always a good way to disarm them.

115 This is veering close to the Introducing Irrelevant Issues fallacy that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition fell into. However, it avoids it by accepting (at least partially) the Government's diagnosis of what is wrong with Now, and focusing on how the Opposition's Action is more likely to lead to the Then that both sides agree is desirable. By focusing on an alternative solution, rather than finding fault with the solution presented by the Government, the Member of the Opposition also cleverly distinguishes himself from the first half of his team.

First, though, to the speech from the Member of the Government. She says that women will be better represented if every constituency has a woman MP, and that women's issues will be better addressed. This is to fall into the sexist assumption that there are issues that only women can and should deal with. Why should a male MP not deal with an issue of discrimination or sexual harassment? Why should he not campaign against the gender pay gap? Can white people not fight racism? Can straight people not take a stand against homophobia?

(CHAIR knocks for one minute.)

What is needed is for both genders - for all people, in fact - to address sexism. Partitioning the task off to women diminishes the seriousness of the issue. She says that women are more likely to be promoted in a 50 / 50 parliament.¹¹⁶ Does she imagine, though, that the mere presence of women in government will address the endemic sexism in society? Margaret Thatcher was at the top of government for eleven years. Did she eliminate sexism? Did she care about women who had not had the good fortune to marry a millionaire as she did? The Member of the Government claims that an equal parliament will increase our standing in the world. Will it, really, if our society continues to be systemically sexist? Will it not rather increase our reputation for hypocrisy, with a 50 / 50 parliament as mere window dressing while the deep structures of sexism continue?¹¹⁷

Now to my main points. Equal representation does not guarantee equal treatment. It is entirely possible to have a Parliament which is completely representative of our society in every respect, in terms of gender, race, sexuality and socio-economic background, but which still does not address inequality.

PRIME MINISTER

On a point of information.

MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITION

Yes please.

PRIME MINISTER

Would such a Parliament not be much more likely to address inequality than the current one?

MEMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT

Likely, perhaps, but not certain. The election of the US's first black

116 Use of language. 'Equal parliament' sounds fair, rational, normal; '50 / 50' sounds uncertain, unstable.

117 This is the nub of the Member of the Opposition's argument; the Government's measure is not intrinsically wrong, it just doesn't solve the problem it says it will solve.