

president in 2008 clearly did not eliminate racism from American society. In fact, Obama's time in power may even have done some harm by lulling people into a false sense of security, making them imagine that the problem of race in the US had been solved; the upsurge of racist rhetoric and white supremacist violence in the US under President Trump has shown how dangerous that complacency was. My concern is that the Government's measure will give the impression that sexism has been eliminated, when it has not; and that this impression will actually prevent sexism from being tackled.¹¹⁸

Secondly, the Government's measure does not address the real roots of sexism in our society. As has already been pointed out, MPs tend to come from educated and prosperous backgrounds; this applies to female MPs no less than male MPs. But the real scandal of sexism is not female Oxbridge graduates who were educated at private schools not getting as many promotions as their male colleagues. The real scandal is working-class women in insecure employment as cleaners or carers, unable to support their families; poor, uneducated women suffering silently at the hands of violent partners, knowing that the police will not take their side; women driven by poverty into prostitution, at the mercy of brutal pimps and people traffickers.¹¹⁹

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

On a point of information.

MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITION

Yes please.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

These issues are all real ones. They need addressing. An equal parliament is more likely to address them.

MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITION

An equal parliament in terms of gender, maybe; but an equal parliament dominated still by people who know nothing of the issues I have outlined, and are therefore likely to think that because they have an equal number of women MPs, they have solved the problems of sexism when they have not.

(CHAIR knocks for four minutes.)

To my last point. A 50 / 50 parliament might look like justice. But it will not achieve justice. It will allow those who wish to keep poor women, disadvantaged women, forgotten and marginalised women

118 This is a bold but very effective response; essentially, it looks like you have solved the problem, but you haven't, and that makes the problem worse.

119 This enargia energises the debate by introducing a whole new class of issues which have not been presented in the debate so far, and allows the Member of the Opposition to change the direction of the debate in quite a striking and memorable way.

in their place, to say, 'Look; you have equality; what more do you want?' It will distract and divert energy from the real struggle against sexism, which is rooted not in political but in economic structures. It will give the false impression that the problem has been solved when in fact it has merely been avoided.

So, we oppose this measure, not only because it will not work, but because it is an unnecessary distraction from the real issues. It will not achieve equal power for women; it will not tackle the roots of sexism; it will be a mere smokescreen, hiding the failure to tackle the real problem. It is the wrong solution to a real problem, and must be opposed.¹²⁰

CHAIR

I thank the Member of the Opposition for his fine speech and call on the Government Whip to sum up the case for the Government side.

GOVERNMENT WHIP

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will be summing up the Government's case for a law making it compulsory for 50% of MPs to be female. I will be showing how the current situation means that Parliament is not doing its job, because it is not representing the British people, how our measure will make it more representative, and how the increased number of women MPs will change not only politics for the better, but society as a whole for the better. I will be showing how the Opposition's claims that our measure is undemocratic, unnecessary and counter-productive are wrong, and how it will be part of the solution to the systemic sexism in our society to which they refer.¹²¹

First, though, to respond to the speech by the Member of the Opposition. He claims that equal representation does not lead to equal treatment. Well, I have news for him. Equal representation is part of equal treatment.¹²² At the moment, women - not just the privileged elite he claims make up the majority of MPs, but women voters, in other words one half of the population - are not treated equally because they are not being represented equally.

He talks very movingly of the deep systemic sexism suffered by economically disadvantaged women, and says that our measure will distract from their struggles.

(CHAIR knocks for one minute.)

However, I think that he is falling into the error of letting the best be the enemy of the good. Just because correcting one injustice does

120 This is a very bold speech by the Member of the Opposition, which tackles the problem of the third speaker's need to find new material for an extension by taking a radically different approach from the first two speakers on his side, without directly contradicting them. He deals with both POIs with the same bold effectiveness.

121 The Government Whip concisely summarises the points of all three speakers so far, and also signposts how he will be rebutting the Opposition. It may seem a little repetitive, but this is inevitable to a degree in a Whip's speech; Whips must not introduce any new ideas. The trick is to present the ideas in a fresher, clearer, more concise way.

122 This sentence is a brilliantly crisp summary of his case. If you can boil down your case to a single sentence or phrase, then do so.