

Above all, though, we reject the very concept of quotas. Quotas distort the systems they intervene in, and they undermine the people they claim to support. We heard much from the Government about the plight of an ambitious young woman, deterred from entering politics. How will this young woman feel if she achieves success not on her own merits, but as a statutory woman in a two person constituency? How, indeed, would a young man, eminently qualified to be a candidate, but excluded because of his gender, feel? How will this promote either self-respect or respect for women politicians?¹³³

PRIME MINISTER

On a point of information.

OPPOSITION WHIP

Yes please.

PRIME MINISTER

Women MPs elected under our system will not be elected as 'statutory women'. They will be competing against a wide range of other candidates on an all-woman list. They will win, like their male counterparts, because they have earned more votes than any other candidate.

OPPOSITION WHIP

None the less, they will not be competing on a level playing field, because the all-woman list will not be open to men. It will not be a truly fair, open, equal contest.¹³⁴

So, to the points of clash.

The Government claim that Parliament is not representative. We say that it is, because our current voting system is equal and fair. They say that their measure will promote respect for women in public life and in positions of power; we say it will have the opposite effect, as it will create resentment and will undermine women's achievement. They say it will help to address the problems women face; we say it will be a distraction from these problems, and will only give the illusion of having solved them.¹³⁵

(CHAIR gives the knock for four minutes.)

Speakers on the Government side have good intentions, but they are naive. Their proposed measure will only make worse the problem it claims to solve, and will not address the real problems that will still exist. Let us not give up the seat of power to women; let us

¹³³ This is a much more effective passage of rhetoric, as it uses erotema to bring home the human consequences of the measure.

¹³⁴ This is an excellent response to the POI, as it introduces an unanswerable objection to the all-woman voting list; that it is excluding.

¹³⁵ Good crisp use of antithesis to sum up the points of clash.

encourage them to ask for it. Let us not hold open the door for women; let us encourage them to push open the door themselves. Let us oppose this ill thought through and needless measure.¹³⁶

CHAIR

I thank the Opposition Whip for her fine speech, and all the speakers for their contributions to what has been an impassioned and stimulating debate. I would now like to ask the Judge to give her feedback, and her verdict.

JUDGE

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, too, to all the debaters for such an intelligent, engaged and competitive debate. The standard was extremely high. In particular, I was impressed by the use of structure and signposting; all the speeches were very easy to follow. There were some really excellent arguments, and some combative points of information. Where there were weaker arguments, they were very effectively called out in rebuttal. The final result was very close.

Now to individual feedback. I will take the speakers in their teams.

First, the Prime Minister. The mechanism was very strong and well thought through. The structure and signposting was superb. She dealt very well with the first point of information, turning it back against the Opposition Whip. She was, however, less sure with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition's point of information. Her argument was based too much on generalisation, and she did not argue through thoroughly enough the way in which the measure would bring about a change in culture.

Next, to the Deputy Prime Minister. His rebuttal was excellent, very successfully turning the Leader of the Opposition's arguments against her. However, he was a little evasive with points of information, not engaging with them fully. I also felt his arguments were based a bit too much on a rather vague sense of how women might be perceived, without much basis in evidence.

To the next team. The Leader of the Opposition made a very strong and effective assault on the Prime Minister's generalisations about gender. He also focused very clearly and helpfully on the central clash of any quota debate; individual action against collective action. His arguments were strong, with the exception of the 'slippery slope' argument, which was quite rightly called out. He could also have followed through more thoroughly with the counter-measures to the Government's mechanism.

¹³⁶ This is a rather underdeveloped speech by the Opposition Whip. It is telling that she does not use the full time. She tends to assert her arguments rather than develop them. To a degree this is inevitable at this stage of the debate, but even in a final Whip's speech there is scope for development and amplification. She does, however, deal with POIs well.