

UK parliament debates banning Donald Trump—but what about David Cameron?

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Speaking at the end of a three-hour debate on whether to ban Republican US Presidential candidate Donald Trump from entering the United Kingdom, Labour's Paul Flynn boasted, "The triumph of today is that we have had a debate that has been seen by many people outside, including in the United States, and they have seen Parliament at its very best."

It would, he added, "enhance the standing of this Parliament and reinforce our relationship with our great ally, the United States."

It is difficult to know whether this was monumental self-delusion or low-order sarcasm.

The debate was triggered by a public petition, launched in response to Trump's call to ban Muslims from the US, which received more than 576,000 signatures. This is more than five times the number required for MPs to consider sending the matter for debate in parliament under legislation intended to portray the institution as responsive to the concerns and wishes of the electorate. It is the most signatures ever received since the launch of this futile charade by the Conservatives two years ago. As always, the debate was non-binding and no vote was taken.

The anti-Trump petition noted, "The UK has banned entry to many individuals for hate speech. The same principles should apply to everyone who wishes to enter the UK. If the United Kingdom is to continue applying the 'unacceptable behaviour' criteria to those who wish to enter its borders, it must be fairly applied to the rich as well as poor, and the weak as well as powerful."

Flynn was addressing only around 50 MPs out of 650. Most, including the Conservatives, had a few scathing remarks on Trump. If there was anything to choose between them, it was that the Tories made more of opposing Trump being banned by proclaiming a

burning commitment to upholding the democratic right to free speech, while Labour speakers generally stressed a desire not to make him a martyr.

Tom Tugendhat was the most unrestrained hypocrite on the Tory side, citing Thomas More's belief in "the liberties of thought and faith" before stating that "liberty is not something that we can take in portion or in part. It comes as one and as a whole."

On the other side of the rhetorical divide, the crown must go to Jack Dromey, Labour's shadow home affairs minister, who supported a ban. The former chairman of the National Council for Civil Liberties saw nothing wrong in baldly declaring that "freedom of speech is not an absolute" and nor is the right "to come to our shores."

Perhaps the most cringe-inducing contribution came from Corri Wilson of the SNP. Speaking for her Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock constituency, she stressed that the most important consideration was that Trump had bought the Turnberry golf course in 2014 and was "investing £200 million in it."

Turnberry "staff, contractors and members... do not talk about Trump the politician, or Trump the showman. They talk about a man with a passion for golf and a commitment and a clear vision of the future for that resort."

Truly this was indeed parliament at its very best.

All of this is nonsense, mixed with rank hypocrisy. The UK is not about to ban a US Republican presidential candidate, even if he wore a swastika on his arm. But perhaps more importantly, it was a means whereby MPs could pat each other on the back and proclaim how much more reasonable the assembled "honourable members" were than the idiotic Trump and, by extension, how much more "civilised" Britain is in its dealings with its Muslim minority.

Except that the very day that the 50 MPs gathered in parliament's Westminster Hall, Prime Minister David Cameron was announcing to the world his intention to step up his campaign to stir up anti-Muslim sentiment. In a column for Rupert Murdoch's *Times*, Cameron declared that, supposedly to ensure that women will not be "second-class citizens", he would force "all migrants to learn English."

"There is also an important connection to extremism," he claimed. "I am not saying separate development or conservative religious practices directly cause extremism. That would be insulting to many who are devout and peace-loving. But they can help a young person's slide towards radicalisation."

Cameron claimed that "some 190,000 British Muslim women—or 22 per cent—speak little or no English despite many having lived here for decades. Forty thousand of these women speak no English at all."

The Runnymede Trust puts the figure at six percent.

His liberal pose of concern for women did not survive another paragraph, with Cameron threatening, "We've already introduced a language test for new migrants, but I believe it's time to be much more demanding... At the moment, someone can move here with very basic English and there's no requirement to improve it over time. We will change that. We will now say: if you don't improve your fluency that could affect your ability to stay in the UK."

From October, people coming to the UK on a five-year spousal visa will have to take a test after two and a half years to show they are making efforts to improve their English. Asked on *BBC Radio Four* what would happen to those who failed, Cameron replied, "They can't guarantee that they'll be able to stay."

That same day, Cameron declared that ending "gender segregation" also meant that it was now considered "proper and sensible" that Muslim women should be forced to remove face veils, like hijabs and niqabs, when asked by public officials.

"It should apply to any public official including schools, hospitals, councils, the police," he said, which he claimed was somehow more enlightened than the type of blanket ban introduced in France.

The British ruling elite can make no pretence of being more liberal than Trump because the stirring up of anti-Muslim sentiment is as much a part of political life in the UK as it is in America and Europe. It is rooted not

in the stupidity and ignorance of individuals such as Trump, or Cameron for that matter, but the requirement of the ruling elite to poison the political atmosphere with nationalism and xenophobia—in order to create scapegoats for the social problems produced by capitalism and, above all, to legitimise the turn to imperialist wars of conquest and the repressive measures and curtailment of fundamental democratic rights associated with the "war on terror."

Parliament and the rotten pro-business parties that occupy it are not an avenue through which redress can be sought against anti-Muslim discrimination, but rather its source. In this regard the role played by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn is pernicious. He was on hand once again to make the claim that everything can be resolved by a little education and goodwill.

In his usual Panglossian mode, Corbyn told the BBC's *Andrew Marr Show* the day before the debate that he had invited Trump "on his visit to Britain to come with me to my constituency.... what I was going to do was go down to the mosque with him and let him talk to people there."

"Take a walk round central Manchester, take a walk round any of our cities, and understand that, yes, we've got problems but we've also got a great community, a great society and cohesion. He might learn something, you never know."



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