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“This House Would Welcome the Return of a Labour Government”

On Thursday 15 January, the Union hosted a politically timely debate over the merits of a return of Labour government.

The first speaker in proposition Girton student Holly Higgins opened the debate by noting the failure of the current Conservatives, referencing economic indicators such as widespread food bank usage and the United Kingdom’s downgrade from a AAA rating, saying that “under Tories, work no longer pays.” Higgins specifically noted tax cuts for millionaires and spending cuts on important legislation as problematic Conservative policy. She went on to praise the virtue of a new Labour government, arguing that Labour would increase minimum wage, cut out corporate tax avoidance and otherwise provide government services such as childcare to increase the standard of living.

Following Higgins, MP Crispin Blunt opened the debate for opposition with a bold assertion of his audience’s rationality. He argued that Labour has a track record of steady spending increases that makes for bad economic policy. He went to argue that market confidence in the United Kingdom resulted from spending cuts facilitated by the Conservative government. Blunt then critiqued Labour on the grounds of inconsistency, calling their policies populism without a defining voice. He also brought the leadership of Labour’s Ed Milliband into question. He concluded with an assertion that a vote for the proposition would cast doubt his opening statement regarding this house’s rationality.

David Lammy, MP for Tottenham, continued the case for opposition. Lammy began by rebutting Blunt’s critique of Labour debt as erroneous on the grounds that Conservative spending cuts have been responsible for a great deal of British debt. He warned that the next term of a Conservative government would cause England to begin to resemble the American model for welfare. He argues for taxation on cigarette companies and bankers’ bonuses in order to maintain the country’s financial solvency. Lammy was able to uniquely appeal to his audience in a well-received critique of George Osborne, specifically on the grounds that Osborne attended Oxford. He also argued for the creation of affordable housing through rent caps. Lammy concluded by describing a litany of Labour’s achievements in the creation of “the welfare state,” and urged a proposition vote.

Queens’ medic and The Tab Editor Charlie Bell continued for opposition. He critiqued the Labour party’s education policy on grounds of inconsistency and a failure to make “hard decisions.” He next spoke of Labour economic policy, saying that the Labour manifesto “prioritized ideology over evidence.” He called its medical policy a “cynical game with people’s lives,” and asserted several times throughout the speech that “we deserve better.” Bell’s portrayal of Ed Milliband as an undesirable leader was particularly well-received, and accused Labour of “playing with real people’s lives.” He ended his speech with the proclamation that the people of Britain deserve better than the party he had previously critiqued.

MP Hilary Benn closed the debate for proposition. He first noted that Conservatives advocated for matching Labour spending between 2002 and 2008. He also rebutted Bell’s argumentation on the grounds that healthcare spending was not the cause of the global 2008 financial crisis. He argued that Labour had, on the contrary, prevented the recession from turning into a depression. He argued passionately against the “bedroom tax,” saying that it has adversely influenced almost 2,000 of his constituents and that Labour would be in favor of the abolition of the tax. On healthcare, he asserted that the National Health Service would “not be safe in the hands of a Conservative government.” He ultimately implored voters to facilitate the return of a Labour government.

Author and former Liberal Democrat politician Lembit Öpik closed the debate for opposition. He began by critiquing Labour on the grounds that the party has consistently failed to bring about meaningful change, citing the vote to invade Iraq as an example of undesirable Labour policy. He went on to accuse Labour as playing a large role in facilitating the financial crisis, and asserted that a Labour government would “just borrow the house down.” He concluded his delivery by arguing that Labour cannot be relied on to deliver on their promises, and that as “intelligent, taxpaying electors” the members of this house deserve better. This brought the debate to a close.
Debate Result
Ayes: 42%
Noes: 36%
Abstentions: 22%

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