

YSTT's Political Parties Debate: A Review

By [Ciarán Morrissey](#), Comment Editor (2015/16)

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Photo credit: Xinhua/Reuters Photo

York Student Think Tank have superbly kicked off this academic year with an engaging and entertaining debate. It would be difficult to think of a more fitting event to start the academic year that will ultimately see one of the most interesting general elections in more than a generation.

Taking the form of a 45-minute session to focus on predetermined issues and 45 minutes given to the floor, the debate became engaging immediately, as the first issue debated was the issue of whether or not we should renew our nuclear deterrent. The points made are easy to guess, with one camp largely arguing that it would keep us safe, while the other regarded Trident as, in the words of our Liberal Democrat panellist “an outdated relic”. It is however interesting to note that both the Tories and UKIP wasted no time in asserting Iran was, in the words of Jordan Hennessy, “a rogue, nuclear state”. It sets an alarming precedent for us to make such threatening accusations against a neutral country for the purpose of defending our nuclear deterrent.

On the subject of the economy, Jack, our resident Socialist panellist, appeared to lose the audience with his suggestion that the deficit was an arbitrary number and we should forget about money. Aside from that, the debate followed a generally predictable trajectory. From the sidelines, UKIP, the Greens and the Socialists proposed quite radical approaches to tackling the deficit, while the main three parties focused mainly on blaming one another and citing historical examples of their successes and their opponents' failures. The Green argument focused on the widening gap between the richest and the rest of society, and centred around a tax on the held assets of the super-rich.

Where the debate did start to heat up considerably, as may have been easily predicted, was when the subject of free movement within the EU was brought up. UKIP asserted that free movement was nonsense, and needed to be controlled, and argued that we should place an emphasis on the quality of people coming into this country, regardless of their national origin. The Socialist argument veered off into a discussion about stagnating wages and the need for unionisation, while both Labour and the Liberal Democrats expressed strong support for the free movement of labour into the country. The second half of the debate was dominated by a very lively discussion around the proposed privatisation of Eurostar.

Overall, the debate wasn't dominated by any single faction in particular, though it seems, from the

general mood of the panellists and from the reaction on Twitter, that if we'd had an exit poll the Lib Dems would have been slightly ahead. Our Socialist panellist, possibly due to lacking a party line to regress to, seemed the least prepared, but all of the panellists were courteous, seemingly well informed and made somewhat convincing arguments of their stances.

What is notable was the treatment of UKIP (represented by Michael Hollins) as a party as large and credible as the main three. I think this can be summed up quite nicely in a tweet by Isaac BD: "“I agree with Mike,” has become a lovely microcosm for the scrambling of the major parties to appease the UKIP masses”.



3 comments

Anonymous

16 Oct '14 at 12:46 pm

Nice to see a gender balanced panel

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Ciaran Morrissey

16 Oct '14 at 12:55 pm

The parties chose their own representatives.
Should YSTT have adopted gender quotas?

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Anonymous

16 Oct '14 at 3:07 pm

I don't feel that YSTT should necessarily shoulder the blame, and they've been proactive on gender issues in the past: the Parties should be taking a stronger approach in encouraging female participation on every level. Other societies have used gender quotas before, and achieved gender balanced panels in events like this, but it seems to have done little to change entrenched views on this campus.

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