

Barring Donald Trump from Entering the UK. The “Ban Trump” Petition Targets “Hate Speech”

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Global Research, January 20, 2016

Region: [Europe, USA](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

*“While I think this man is crazy, while I think this man has no valid points to make, I will not be able to silence his voice.” Tom Tugendhat, *The Independent*, 19 January 2016*

Earlier this week, the UK parliament found its agenda occupied by something many members would have rather avoided altogether. The question on whether Donald Trump should be allowed to enter the country was slated for discussion. It was those 570,000 signatures behind a petition calling on the UK government to prevent him coming into the country which pressed that aged body into discussion. Three hours in Westminster Hall were set aside for the debate.

The wording of the “Ban Trump” petition targets what it calls “hate speech”. Her Majesty’s government has previously “banned entry to many individuals” for that reason, and further, such restrictions had to be “applied to the rich as well as the poor.”

The fuss? Trump’s comments about London and its radicalised mix. His comments about race. His comment about how terrifyingly unsafe parts of the metropolis are on account of Islam and its various purportedly ghoulish influences. His suggestion that the US shut down immigration in so far as it involves Muslims.

“This is a man,” insisted Labour legislator Tulip Siddiq, “who is extremely high-profile,... a man who is interviewing for the most important job in the world. His words are not comical, his words are not funny. His words are poisonous.”[1]

Labour’s Paul Flynn, MP for Newport West, decided to take the contrastingly courteous, if somewhat demeaning route of letting Trump in for reasons of education.

“I will urge that we treat him with courtesy inviting him here to show us where the UK ‘no-go’ areas are for police, introducing him to centres of racial harmony in Wales and England, discussing our 24 deaths from gunshots per year compared with 160 this year in the US.”[2]

Flynn further insisted on showing Trump those “unprecedented areas of flooding in England” as a form of didactic instruction. Trump, “the global warming denier” would do well to heed the lessons of his climate change denialism.

Ditto the Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who took note about Trump’s animosity towards Mexicans and Muslims. “As you know, my wife is Mexican and my constituency is very, very multicultural so what I was going to do was go down to the mosque with him and let him talk to people there.”

Yet another, Naz Shah, envisages taking Trump on a curry tour in her constituency city of Bradford. As a “proud Muslim woman”, she would introduce the candidate to multiethnic gastronomy and the values of the Quran.

Such suggestions seem like grand acts of futility and tend to play right into Trump’s hands. But they certainly are not as detrimental as a total ban. His aim is not to go back to the school of hard won awareness. Rather, it is to convince others that he has no need to. At the very least, positions as those of Flynn take the view that debate, rather than exclusion, should be embraced.

The Trump brand was not shunned by all in the House of Commons. Conservative MP Philip Davies could only find admiration for a politician who stood up to “say things that are unpopular.” Be honest, upfront, direct.

The anger expressed about Trump’s comments are understandable enough, but venting about them is tantamount to an undue embroidering, a vesting of gravitas. He speaks about what he does not know; he utilises the soapbox for reasons of populism that his opponents dignify by response. To give him such privileged status – that of being refused entry – ranks as one of the more absurd points. Why could he be so dangerous, so revolutionary? Uttering the unspeakable or the unmentionable, his defenders will say.

The very idea of placing a possible ban on the debate list also gives him a certain “street cred”, a form of patriotic zest that may well make him even more appealing back home. Flynn even went so far as to suggest that a ban would give the impression that the UK was awash with anti-American sentiment.

Similar views were expressed by Tory MP Andrew Murrison. Despite Trump’s obvious ridiculousness, to ban such a figure, certainly one with a chance of becoming president, would be seen as an “almighty snub” to the United States, an anti-American instinct played out behind the façade of targeting hate speech.

Besides, suggested fellow Tory colleague Sir Edward Leigh, to do so would be to invite a sense of disproportion into the debate. The UK had a glaring record of inviting despots of blood thirsty character in the past, characters who had soiled records “far worse than anything Donald Trump can dream of”.^[3]

What did he genuinely do to deserve that? Best let him in and debate the matters at hand, showing them up as equally absurd and irrelevant in the way free speech ought to. Placing a bar on him will have quite the opposite effect. It was that sentiment that eventually won through.

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Notes

[1] <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/donald-trump-debate-tory-mps-say-uk-should-apologise-to-us-for-having-debate-about-banning-the-a6820156.html>

[2] <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/mps-set-to-debate-whether-to-ban-donald-trump-from-britain-a3158841.html>

[3] <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-35345279>

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