

Heated Exchanges on Question Time from Edinburgh



BBC One's political flagship debate show Question Time was broadcast from Edinburgh's Corn Exchange last night, in front of an audience of 16-17 year olds who will be able to vote for the first time on 18 September 2014.

The panellists included SNPs Angus Robertson, Labour's Anas Sarwar, Conservative leader Ruth Davidson and journalist Lesley Riddoch.

Controversially, UKIP leader Nigel Farage and Respect MP George Galloway who represents Bradford West, were also invited to appear despite having no apparent political mandate in Scotland. Their appearance led to pro-independence campaigners protesting outside the Corn Exchange prior to the show.

First question fell to Kieren Fitzgerald who asked whether surveillance is an acceptable price for national security.

George Galloway argued strongly against it and called for a Nobel Prize for the whistle-blower whilst Anas Sarwar praised the work of the intelligence agencies but questioned William Hague's response to Parliament.

Ruth Davidson backed the work of GCHQ and insisted that the framework does not allow them to get round existing law then Lesley Riddoch questioned the role of Google in the USA. Angus Robertson was concerned about the storage of intelligence data and Nigel Farage urged people to be cautious on social media sites.

The subject then changed to independence and Fiona Murray

asked what benefits would independence bring to young people in Scotland.

This sparked an angry exchange between Angus Robertson who protested about the make-up of the panel, with four anti-independence and only one pro-independence, while host David Dimbleby insisted that there was no BBC bias.

Angus Robertson then explained that in an independent Scotland, we would always have the government that we elect, there would be job creation and we could get rid of nuclear weapons.

Anas Sarwar countered that we need social and economic change and all should have equality of education throughout the UK, while Lesley Riddoch said that she wanted to live in a country with no Trident, has equality of education and embraces renewables, so she will vote yes.

George Galloway then turned on Angus Robertson for his narrow-minded attitude regarding who should have been allowed on the panel and also criticised Alex Salmond's behaviour as unstatesmanlike after the recent incident involving the UKIP leader who was 'run out of town.' He demanded that everyone should have the right to speak.

Angus Robertson supported Alex Salmond and said that he defended the people's right to protest, but Nigel Farage also criticised the First Minister who supported the protestors who acted like 'yobs' when he came to have a debate in Edinburgh.

Ruth Davidson said that the people deserved answers, and pointed out that one in five jobs in the private sector were in companies with headquarters in England, Wales or Northern Ireland.

When David Dimbleby asked for the opinion of the audience, one teenager stated that he thought that Scottish independence would bring people one step closer to discovering aliens!!!

Nigel Farage said that independence would be like swapping masters from Westminster to Brussels. Lesley Riddoch stated that the UK was the most regionally imbalanced country in Europe and quoted figures which suggested that one in 29 people from London were dollar millionaires, a fact which George Galloway disputed as false as there is 'mass poverty and unemployment throughout the UK'.

Anas Sarwar demanded a debate based on fact and accused the SNP of not being straight with the people of Scotland.

Scott Mann then said that he felt that 16/17 year olds did not have enough experience to vote, but George Galloway, Angus Robertson, Lesley Riddoch and Anas Sarwar disagreed.

Ruth Davidson suggested that the current voting age of 18 should remain in place, and Nigel Farage said that lowering the age for one election was 'silly and cheap.'

Cameron Gilchrist then asked the panel whether the UK should intervene in Syria, which started an argument between Angus Robertson and George Galloway,

Angus Robertson blamed the President of Syria, but George Galloway pointed out that President Assad was prepared to negotiate and had been since the beginning then warned of the dangers of arming the opposition. He stated that the opposition should be forced to sit round the table.

Nigel Farage stated that since Blair's time, there appears to have been 'glee' about going to war and our history of interventions in the Middle East have not been successful so we should not get involved.

Lesley Riddoch pointed out that the population the size of Wales had been displaced and that the priority was dialogue. Meanwhile, Angus Robertson pointed out that the UK had armed the Taliban to fight the Soviet Union and said that we should not arm one side, although Russia was arming President Assad.

Last word went to Lesley Riddoch who stated that of the 93,000 killed so far, a high proportion were children.