

Tampons are not a bloody luxury

The MPs voting for the tampon tax show that Britain is stuck in the dark ages

By [Jack Davies](#), Deputy Editor (2017)
Tuesday 10 November 2015

[Playtex tampon](#)

Image: The Period Blog

The UK's MPs voting 305 to 287 against the removal of a 5 per cent tax on women's sanitary products reveals that sinister and archaic views still exist prominently within our so-called 'first-world' nation.

In spite of a petition for the removal of the tax garnering over a quarter of a million signatures, the majority of our parliamentary representatives think it acceptable to continue charging an excess to half of the population for a biological process which is neither optional nor preventable.

Exotic meats such as kangaroo, crocodile and ostrich are not considered luxuries. HMRC thinks Jaffa Cakes are essentials, but apparently not tampons and sanitary towels. You don't need to be female or even particularly liberal to see what a ludicrous notion this is.

Interestingly, of the 305 MPs voting against the removal of the tax, 303 were Conservatives, including Chancellor George Osborne. I have news for even the most antiquated and Etonian of us out there, which the Conservatives may wish to keep in mind: this is no longer the 1950s.

Women are no longer second-class citizens, and excuse the image, but no human being should be charged a surplus for buying something to prevent their own blood trickling continuously down their legs once a month.

Put it like this, and you see the preposterousness of the tax.

However, I don't wish to be completely and emphatically cynical to those who voted against its abolition. It is not plainly black and white. The tax is actually one levied by the EU, and five per cent is the absolute minimum that can be charged under their conditions (this minimum was imposed by Labour in 2000). To remove the tax in the UK Mr Osborne would have to publish a strategy for negotiating its removal with the other EU states.

Be that as it may, the fact that he and most other Tories voted against the amendment echoes one distinct view: "we just can't be arsed with the hassle".

What we have instead is a well-meaning but albeit token gesture from Tory MP David Gauke, who has promised he will "raise the issue with the European Commission and other member states setting out our views that it should be possible for member states to apply a zero-rate to sanitary products".

This is nothing like the proactive and liberal stance that the UK could have taken had they actually already voted against the tax.

In my opinion, Cameron's government has missed a trick; making significant moves to preserve gender equality could have had sizeable benefits to a ministry that has been oft-criticised for being harsh and

uncaring.

The tax itself was introduced in the UK following their joining of the European Common Market in 1973. The Sex Discrimination Act wasn't until 1975. This means that the UK is currently continuing to charge a sexist tax introduced prior to one of the first major steps in creating gender equality.

It's equivalent to continuing to employ a law regarding the rights of black people that was introduced before the abolition of the slave trade. In other words, it is entirely absurd.

But apparently, the majority of our parliament thinks not. Those in the upper echelons need to have an epiphany and drag Britain, and if needs be Europe, into the 21st century.



One comment

Choose your battles

10 Nov '15 at 7:19 pm

You raise the good point that this is not a Conservative Tax, but an EU one. But passing this Bill isn't how Parliament acts, and has never been how Parliament acts. The Commons, as Corbyn should learn, is not a student union, it has actual legislative power, so to make laws as 'gestures' of support but with no real possibility of implementation gives the impression that it is impotent.

If there were a way of passing a motion of support, the Conservatives would probably support one on this issue, but there isn't a Parliamentary mechanism for that. Creating yet another battleground for EU policy warfare is not, and should not be on anyone's policy agenda given the current climate, and so those protesting the tax should direct their anger at their MEPs, not their MPs.

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