

Anti-BNP Panel Debate

Before I speak I need to tell you all I am an independent student in this debate. I do not represent the views of 'Judaism' or a certain sect of Judaism these are purely my own thoughts. I am purely **A** Jewish voice in the debate.

I wish I didn't have to be here. I wish that I had no reason to be on a panel that was debating how can we reduce the support for the BNP. But Nick Griffin is my Member of European Parliament (MEP). He was elected in June to represent the North-West in the European elections. And I am not happy with that.

He doesn't represent me as a liberal minded Jewish student living in his constituency. Now I am not typical of residents of the North West, I am from Harrow, the second most religiously diverse borough in Britain and I moved here two years ago. But I feel I have the duty as a British citizen, Jew and anthropology student to try and understand what is making someone vote for the BNP. I feel it is important to listen and understand a local person's opinions and potential reasons for voting for the BNP. I would then try and influence to reduce his affinity to the BNP and show him that he does not need to support a BNP candidate for his grievances to be listened to and to have his views represented.

Nick Griffin and the BNP actually achieved less votes in June than they did in the 2004 elections but the lack of interest in this referendum and the protest against Labour meant people were not voting, the BNP came fifth in the popular vote and due to the electoral system were able to be elected to become our Members of the European Parliament in Strasbourg and Brussels.

What can WE as Muslim and Jewish Students on campus do? Well I don't think we can take a direct approach. I think a Muslim and a Jewish student door knocking together telling people that voting BNP is wrong is not a great idea. It would not be effective and could potentially be very dangerous for those involved. Instead I think the Jewish and Muslim students can do three things together

1: make sure their respective communities are registered to vote and are voting come polling day.

2. Work together on a shared social action project , so that the wider community can see Jews and Muslims can work together and they are not just bringing their conflict about the Middle East to British streets.

3. reflect and openly discuss issues of integration and assimilation which are difficult topics brushed under the carpet, at least in the Jewish community.

Hold events for non-Muslims and non-Jews where common misconceptions can be aired, understood and broken.

The UK Jewish community is largely made up of descendents of Eastern European Jews who migrated to the UK in the early 1900's. Jews have been in Britain for over 350 years and have been a prominent ethnic minority and religious community for thousands of years across the world. Some of Anglo-Jewry, are Jews whose parents came from the Middle East and North Africa. In total the most up to date estimate numbers the total UK Jewish community at 250,000, mostly in London and Manchester, but different people count Jews differently.

My great-grandparents came from Austria and like many Jewish people only moved to Britain to flee persecution on the continent. To think that today I now have to stand here and talk out against our own far-right party is not particularly pleasing. Now it's dangerous to overstate what BNP policies are and I am in no way suggesting they have a second holocaust as party policy but

their language of 'ethnic-cleansing' and rights for indigenous Britons (from the Stone Age) fills me with despair that potentially the future won't be easy for the Jewish or Muslim communities in the UK.

Recent statistics have shown that 2% of the country support the BNP. This is not a surprising statistic; people have prejudices that they feel the BNP listen to them. But what is more worrying is that the BNP know which areas, which councils, which wards will be likely to vote BNP and then target those areas so that their representation increases. They win more votes, gain more support and in certain areas of the country violence along ethnic lines flair up. I don't want to have to wait for this to happen again. History can repeat itself but it doesn't have to. The race riots in Burnley and Oldham in 2001 would be examples of incidents in the north when dialogue between communities broke down. We need to calmly and rationally talk through differences rather than allow an outside incident to flare up passions and feelings amongst neighbours. I hope that the Jewish and Muslim students here at Manchester, can be a shining example and work together, at least until the next election, so that we can reduce the chance of BNP victory come the Election Day.

I wanted today's event to occur to slowly heal differences between British Muslims and Jews and a threat like the spread of the BNP could and should unite us together. I think both communities have a lot to gain from each other. I know the Jewish community have become an extremely confident as a minority grouping and have various institutions to support them. Politically and practically the Jewish community and Muslim community are united on this issue of trying to reduce xenophobia, anti-Semitism and anti-Islam. I would like to break through the layers of cultural confusion about each religious group and have us work together, united as students to fight this very worrying threat.