

SEPTEMBER 2009

BNP

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DEBATING MATTERS
TOPIC
GUIDES

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MOTION:

**“IT IS
UNDEMOCRATIC
TO TREAT THE BNP
DIFFERENTLY FROM
OTHER PARTIES”**

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INTRODUCTION

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1 The British National Party (BNP) has been one of the main talking points of politics in the last year. Starting in November 2008 with the leaking of the membership list [Ref: [BBC News](#)], ongoing debates about the banning of BNP members from public sector professions, Nick Griffins' on-off attendance at the Queen's summer garden party, [Ref: [Daily Mail](#)] and BNP by-election successes have ensured that the party remain firmly in the public eye. In the build up to the European elections in June, politicians from all sides joined together in an anti-BNP alliance, warning voters that the consequences of their apathy could spell success for the far right. The winning of two MEPs would seem to prove their point, giving the BNP elected legitimacy.

But some have suggested that we should treat alarmist predictions of a BNP advance with caution, arguing that the party is being used as a bogeyman to mask deeper political problems. Some go further still, suggesting that behind the clamour to 'stop the BNP' lurks a suspicion of popular power. Whether or not this is a flash in the pan or a real threat, it is a reality that the BNP do exist, work in a wide variety of professions, fight elections and win hundreds of thousands of votes. But questions remain about the place of the BNP in a democratic society. Should we defend freedom of political association to the hilt, or do the BNP pose too grave a threat to democracy and society to be ignored?

KEY TERMS

[Fascism](#)

[Democracy](#)

[Freedom of Speech](#)



BNP:

"It is undemocratic to treat the BNP differently from other parties"



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Is the BNP a real electoral threat?

In the recent 2009 European Elections the BNP polled over 940 000 votes nationwide, leaving them with two elected MEP in two Northern England constituencies. The BNP also have over 60 town, district, borough and county councilors across the UK. Some politicians and anti-fascist activists point to these facts and the BNP's steady electoral rise as clear evidence that the BNP now pose a significant electoral threat, with a core racist membership and vote. Pointing to the growth and electoral success of far right parties across Europe, they warn that BNP gains become yet more dangerous when we consider the possibility of Pan-European far-right alliances and networks.

[Ref: [Guardian](#)] However, others have been more dismissive of these successes and warn against misdiagnosing the problem. Underlining the small number of council seats currently held by the BNP (an estimated 0.25% of all councilors in the UK) and the still fairly insignificant share of the Euro vote, up from 4.9% in 2004 to 6.2% in 2009, they maintain that the threat is overstated. Arguing against the claim that the far right is on the rise, they suggest that the party have been the beneficiaries of a protest against the political mainstream, contending that it is a wider, more profound, political crisis that needs our attention, not the antics of a largely discredited fringe party.

“No platform for racists?”

There has been bitter division about tactics to oppose the BNP. Several groups such as Searchlight, Unite Against Fascism (UAF), and NUS support a ‘no platform policy’ for the BNP, which they suggest limits their scope and protects minorities from racism and abuse. Whether this takes the form of sabotaging the BNP's

summer ‘Red, White and Blue’ festival, or banning members of the BNP from speaking in public, the policy is one of zero-tolerance. But recently, there has been some opposition to these tactics, with a number of student activists challenging the NUS's policy in particular. They make the case that ‘no platform’ is both illiberal and anti-democratic and that it is only by debating and exposing the poor politics of the BNP that they be defeated in public and at elections. Opponents of a no platform policy argue that tackling the BNP by denying the right to free speech is not only self-defeating, but might well make the problem worse by giving the party additional publicity and enabling members to pose as defenders of free speech.

Either you're with us, or against us?

The leak of the BNP membership list earlier in the year also reignited the long standing debate of whether further bans on BNP members, such as those held for the police and prison service, should be applied in the teaching, nursing and civil service professions. [Ref: [BBC News](#)] Those favouring a ban, such as Schools' secretary Ed Balls, argue that BNP members' views are so opposed to a public service commitment to an inclusive and democratic society that they are unable to adequately perform their roles in the public sector. But some commentators are troubled by evidence of a creeping authoritarianism and intolerance. They suggest that sacking people because of political beliefs is not only antithetical to the idea of a free and open society but has implications for the democratic rights of us all. Once one group of people can have their rights taken away on the basis of their opinions, it is argued that the floodgates are opened to ban yet more groups. [Ref: [BBC News](#)]

Is the BNP a threat to democracy?

Leading political figures, such as former London mayor, Ken Livingstone, and David Lammy MP argue that the BNP is heavily staffed by 'members with openly racist, fascist and Nazi pasts' and that some have been involved in racial violence. [Ref: [Guardian](#)] Others argue that BNP policies for the repatriation of non-white Britons are racist. Many more suggest that the BNP is using democracy to gain power and influence in order to destroy it. Responses to this threat, they say, must therefore be steadfast and uncompromising. But others oppose such measures, arguing that the BNP has become a red herring. They suggest that attacking the BNP is a cheap shot for mainstream parties, allowing them to stand on the moral high ground and avoid their own lack of popular support and indeed some anti-democratic and anti-immigrant policies of their own parties. In this respect, they warn, avoiding debate about politics and scarring voters into voting by stating 'vote for anyone but the BNP' is a greater threat to democracy than the BNP itself.

ESSENTIAL READING

It's not censorship to deny the BNP a platform

Andy Newman *Index on Censorship* 05 June 2009

Censorship is the wrong way to combat the BNP

Claire Fox *Index on Censorship* 03 June 2009

FOR

The Myth of a far-right surge

Rob Lyons *spiked* 8 June 2009

The BNP fantasy created by anti-democrats

Nick Cohen *Observer* 24 May 2009

Even racists have rights

Kenan Malik *Bergens Tidende* 5 December 2008

Liberty and the BNP

The Times 20 November 2008

It should not be an offence to belong to the BNP

Mick Hume *spiked* 18 November 2008

AGAINST

Expel the BNP from schools

Chris Keates *Guardian* 20 June 2009

Why the Nazis hate democracy

Esme Choonara *Socialist Worker Online* 16 June 2009

We need to wake up and tackle the BNP poison head on

Peter Hain *Guardian* 29 April 2009

Recession and resurgence of the far right

Sabby Dhalu *Guardian* 23 February 2009

The rise of the fascist BNP is a threat to democracy

Ken Livingstone *Guardian* 16 February 2007

IN DEPTH

The Way Forward

Nick Lowles *Searchlight Magazine* July 2009

If anything, this result understates the support for the BNP

Rod Liddle *Spectator* 10 June 2009

The rise of British racism may be horribly close

Fraser Nelson *Spectator* 27 May 2009

Why I applauded the 'BNP Ballerina'

Shirley Dent *spiked* 15 January 2007

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BACKGROUNDEERS

From the street to the screen

Matthew Goodwin *New Statesman* 21 May 2009

Hope not hate and the cheek of Harman

Vengeance and Fashion 10 April 2009

Yes, the BNP could win in Europe

Matthew Goodwin and Robert Ford *Guardian* 19 February 2009

The rise of the far-right

Jon Cruddas MP and Nick Lowles *New Statesman* 19 June 2008

The British National Party gains strength

The Times 19 April 2007

Racism, recruitment and how the BNP believes it is just 'one crisis away from power'

Ian Cobain *Guardian* 22 December 2006

Right-wing terrorism still alive and plotting

Gerry Gable *Searchlight Magazine* November 2005

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ORGANISATIONS

Unite Against Fascism

Searchlight Magazine

Hope Not Hate

Office Of Public Sector Employment

NASUWT-The Teachers Union

The British National Party

IN THE NEWS

Beer thrower beaten up by BNP

BBC 22 July 2009

Sink immigrants' boats- Griffin

BBC 8 July 2009

Police fear far-right terror attack

Guardian 6 July 2009

Ed Balls considers ban on BNP teachers

Guardian 21 June 2009

BNP could be very serious force

BBC 16 June 2009

Egg attack on BNP leader Griffin

BBC 9 June 2009

European Elections 2009: BNP in line for £4 Million cash boost in

Euro succes

Telegraph 9 June 2009

BNP secures two European seats

BBC 8 June 2009

BNP wins first Hertfordshire seat

BBC 5 June 2009

Boris heads bid stop BNP leader Nick Griffin hijacking Queens'

summer party

Daily Mail 22 May 2009

BNP politician Richard Barnbrook could be suspended from

London Assembly

Guardian 12 May 2009

Alarm over rise of BNP

Independent 21 February 2009

Church of England votes to ban BNP clergy

Guardian 10 February 2009

BNP members 'targeted by threats'

BBC 19 November 2008

Unions push to expel BNP members

BBC 5 November 2008

Call for migrant housing rethink

BBC 21 May 2007

BNP leader celebrates acquittal outside race hate trial Philippe

Naughton

The Times 10 November 2006

BNP teacher 'can only teach whites'

Daily Mail 14 July 2006

ACPO bans police from joining BNP

BBC 27 July 2004

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NOTES

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- I am a sixth form student and would like further details about events in my area
- I am interested in becoming a Debating Matters judge
- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
- Other (please specify)

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Surname

School/company/
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Professional role
(if applicable)

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Email address

School/work phone

Mobile phone

**“DEBATING MATTERS
TEACHES A WAY
OF THINKING.
INTELLECTUAL
ARCHITECTURE
IS CREATED BY
ENGAGING WITH
IDEAS”**

TRISTRAM HUNT, HISTORIAN & BROADCASTER

