

Why liberals should watch the BNP on the BBC

LSE blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2009/10/22/why-liberals-should-watch-the-bnp-on-the-bbc/

2009-10-22



Watch Him

I will be watching [Question Time](#) tonight and I do think the BBC were justified in allowing the BNP to take part.

The boycott campaign is facile stuff. It is knee-jerk gesture politics and will simply boost the programme's ratings.

There is a perfectly credible case that comes to the opposite conclusion. Indeed, my colleague Bart Cammaerts made it brilliantly here [on this very blog](#). He points to the real boost that extremists get from publicity in mainstream media.

I accept that Freedom of expression is not an absolute, so all these cases must be judged on their own merits. In the past I have argued for a No-Platform position. Every media organisation or platform has a right to moderate its own content so can choose not to give certain views any space. All journalists accept that they are subject to legal and social limits. So I am not making a simple libertarian argument. But in this case I think that it is better to have the BNP on the BBC than to ban them.

Firstly, I think in principle that they have a right to be heard.

Secondly, censoring extremists fuels their support and gives them a moral case.

Thirdly, the majority population should not shirk from addressing extremist feelings. In the Netherlands the Establishment ignored any criticism of its immigration policies and ended up with a massive backlash that has ended up by shifting Dutch politics way to the right on race. If they had listened to uncomfortable views early on they might have lanced the boil.

Fourthly, with new media it is impossible to somehow silence extremists. Research at LSE on Jihadists, for example, showed that by closing down their websites they simply popped up elsewhere. The process made them stronger and more popular. Only when then the Jihadists were brought onto the same platform as more moderate Muslims did they have to engage with criticism.

Fifthly, I really do think that the BNP are rubbish and stupid and that generally speaking the more people see them challenged, the more they will be marginalised. I do not think we are in a Weimar situation, and Nick Griffin is not a young Adolf.

Of course, tonight's programme will be a farce as the other speakers seek to pose as holier than the others. That will grate when you think how from the Prime Minister downwards (British Jobs For British Workers) politicians have been prepared to wink at racist sentiment.

I don't expect Nick Griffin will have his mind changed by going on Question Time. I accept that his appearance may gladden the heart of racists across the land. But in the long-term I think that allowing him this kind of chance to expose his vile views to public debate will affirm and strengthen the very liberal values that he is seeking to undermine.

If you need more ammunition in the liberal (open) fight with the BNP try [this from David Aaronovitch](#).

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science