

Career controversialists

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By writing this I add to the oxygen of publicity for the [Oxford Union](#) students who have invited Nick Griffin and David Irving to a debate. That's a shame because at the heart of this is the fact that the Oxford Union is not just a forum for open debate. In truth its officers are also motivated by the career enhancement it offers. And all the fuss about inviting two such deeply offensive people to speak is part and parcel of shining up their CVs. Of course, the two speakers are also delighted at the chance to revive their sad little careers which seem to have consisted largely of winding up liberals and frightening people from ethnic minorities.

POLIS clearly stands for freedom of speech, a noble ideal which is easily advocated but hard to implement at the extremes. In practice there is no such thing as an absolute freedom of speech, so the devil is always in the detail. The Oxford Union is posing here. It didn't need to afford these two people this particular platform. Griffin and Irving are not short of media coverage or their own outlets.

The dilemma is neatly summed up in the two sides of the argument in a couple of letters to the [Independent](#). The Oxford Union's Luke Tryl feels that his students need to hear these twisted views so that they can spot what rotters Irving and Griffin are:

"I find their ideas awful and abhorrent; as a proud openly gay man, it terrifies me that the BNP are gaining support in so many areas of the country, including my home town. But I genuinely believe the best way to defeat their views is through debate. Unless their ideas are challenged and exposed for the rubbish that they are, they will continue to gain support."

However, Emanuel De kadt is someone who actually has experience of the ideologies that Griffin and Irving sympathise with in action. He feels differently. He draws upon an interesting analogy from the 1930s which reminds us of what happens when you treat facists lightly:

"Almost 50 years ago, to show how open-minded they were, a group of senior members of the Students' Union at the London School of Economics conceived the idea to invite Oswald Mosley to address the Union. Freedom of speech, in their view, demanded that we hear all views – even those of a man loathed by the vast majority, including, they said, themselves.

At that time, when I spoke in the Union against the invitation, I had pinned my bedraggled Jewish star from the war days in Holland on my jacket. I gave perhaps the most impassioned speech of my entire life. Yes, I could see some merit in allowing Mosley to hold forth on his pernicious views from a soapbox at Hyde Park Corner, but why on earth give the man a prestigious platform such as ours? And why trample on the feelings of many?"

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