

Ali Miraj: It's perfectly rational for the ignored white working class to vote BNP



Ali Miraj has stood for Parliament twice (and [questioned why](#) he found it difficult to find a safe seat) and has been a broadcaster for the Islam Channel. He says it's time that we face up to some home truths about why Britain's white working class feels so alienated before it's too late.

“Stop the fascist BNP”, a young, dishevelled looking man yelled outside Mile End station as he thrust a flyer into my hand. He was desperately trying to drum up support for the “National march and parade against fascism and racism” that took place a little over a week ago. Given that he was doing this in the middle of Tower Hamlets, a borough with one of the highest proportion of ethnic minority residents in the country, this appeared perfectly sensible.

However, it was only last month that the BNP gained a veneer of respectability by taking its first seat on the London Assembly. The question that the tireless campaigner should have been asking was 'why?' This is a question the political establishment has thus far sought to avoid. But for how much longer? It may offend the sensibilities of those who happily munch on sea bass and sip Sancerre at their favourite Italian eatery in Islington or Notting Hill, that ordinary people could possibly vote for a party that wishes to repatriate foreigners and whose leader denies the holocaust. But that is the reality.

It is, in my view, a perfectly rational reaction by a growing proportion of the white working class who feel marginalised by a political elite that would rather ignore them. The latest example of this has been the botched decision by the Labour government to abolish the 10p tax rate which has hit these people more than most. We have become so hooked in this country on bending over backwards for every ethnic minority - a community centre here, an acceptance of a reluctance to learn English there – that we have forgotten the group that is struggling the most – the white working class.

The problems begin at school. According to a report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation carried out last year, nearly half of all low achievers are white British males. White British students on average are more likely than other ethnic groups to persist in low achievement with boys outnumbering girls as low achievers by three to two. Government figures show that only 15% of white working class boys in England got five good GCSE's including Maths and English last year. In contrast, poorer pupils from Indian and Chinese backgrounds fared better with 36% and 52% achieving these results, respectively.

At the last general election, whilst canvassing the streets of Watford in my unsuccessful bid to become its MP, I encountered a feisty lady in her early forties washing her car. When I asked if she would support me I received a curt response. "I am voting BNP coz Britain should be for the British". I was mildly surprised rather than shocked. I had, after all, been touring the TV studios as a supposedly articulate "brown" face within the Tory party, defending the line, "It's not racist to impose limits on immigration."

It seemed pretty obvious that if every year over one hundred and fifty thousand people, the equivalent of a city the size of Peterborough, were settling in the UK, this would not only place strain on public services but also on the cohesion of communities. But I was vilified by opponents on the left, Liberals and Labour alike, and accused of pandering to a racist agenda and engaging in "dog whistle" politics in an attempt to shore up the Conservatives' core vote.

Hardly a surprise then that given that legitimate debate amongst mainstream political parties is stifled, the residents in South Oxhey, just a stone's throw away from Watford, voted for the BNP in the local council elections this year.

Last year, Robert Putnam, a Harvard Professor, argued that his research had shown a steady correlation between ethnically mixed environments and withdrawal from public life. He found that people living amidst diversity tend to "hunker down". They trust their neighbours less, vote less and give less to charity. They are unhappier. To put it simply, "birds of a feather flock together." There is nothing surprising or offensive about this conclusion but it is in stark contrast to the mantra promulgated by the ruling elite.

I was interviewed earlier this year by the BBC in response to a report commissioned by Harriet Harman recommending the introduction of all "ethnic shortlists" in certain constituencies as a means of broadening representation in Parliament. My response was simple, "I am opposed to positive discrimination but if all-ethnic lists are introduced then the group that should be at the top is the white working class". The presenter was in shock. But within the present government or the self-styled Conservative government-in-waiting where are the working class heroes?

In a survey conducted earlier this year as part of the BBC's "White Season", 58% of those questioned felt underrepresented and 62% said that life here had generally become worse in the last decade. Negative attitudes towards immigration in part stem from the very real concern about wages and jobs. The political classes need to understand the feelings of people like Dave, one of my stalwart leaflet deliverers during the last election, whose real income has remained static for the last decade due to the influx of cheap Labour from Eastern Europe.

As a British born and bred individual of Pakistani parentage, who happens to be Muslim, I did not see myself as a natural champion of the white working class. But my fear is that the resentment of ordinary whites is a powder keg waiting to explode. Given that the Pandora's Box of identity politics has been opened, this "group" deserves to be listened to as much as any other. If they are consistently denied a voice by the political mainstream, the embrace of those who seek to exploit their disenchantment to divide society will tighten.