

How to fight the BNP?



One of the most controversial debates in the run-up to the founding conference of Communist Students was on the question of fascism and the British National Party, and what the response of revolutionaries should be. As there are differences within our organisation on this particular question, we have opened it up for discussion and debate.

see page 4



Third camp comic

If you haven't yet read 'Persepolis', a highly original look at a young woman's life in Iran, go and get your copy immediately! Marjane Satrapi describes the struggle against and then life under the Islamic regime.

see page 3

Communist Student University

Communist Students will be one of the co-sponsors of this year's Communist Student University, which takes place on April 21-22 in Sheffield. Please send us an email if you wish to be kept informed about the precise timetable and other issues about the event.

Please email

info@communiststudents.org.uk

communist student

issue no 2
February 2007

No to the theocratic regime! Hands Off the People of Iran!

After a brief let-up, military conflict between the USA or one of its proxies and Iran is again a serious possibility, with Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert making ever more belligerent statements over Iran's nuclear capabilities and George Bush announcing a 'troop surge' in Iraq. These developments have posed sharply the need for the world's anti-war movement to mobilise effectively, to avoid yet another terrible imperialist slaughter.

Unfortunately, not everyone has responded in the most positive fashion. Although nobody barring rightwing hawks seems to be in support of a new war this time around, on the left some groups consider it a matter of principle to suspend criticism of the Iranian regime. This is not only deeply suspect on its own terms, but counterproductive. This regime is thoroughly reactionary - it has brutally broken strikes and suppressed the students', women's and democratic movements.

Those who act as apologists for the regime expose themselves as hypocrites and, more importantly, reduce the effectiveness of the anti-war movement. Although paying occasional lip-service to those struggling against the theocracy, Campaign Iran in practice resorts to defending Ahmadinejad, even pretending that he and his cronies are not trying to develop nuclear weapons - as ludicrous as proposing that Israel does not already have them.

For the anti-war movement to be of any use to Iranians, this has to stop. Our passionate opposition to imperialist war must not prevent us from standing in solidarity with the Iranian people against the repressive forces of their reactionary state.

For more information about the campaign against imperialist war and for principled solidarity with the Iranian workers', women's and democratic

More on this issue inside.

- Third camp comic: Review of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*
- Interview with **Ahmad Zahedi Langaroudi** - a young writer and web blogger in Iran, currently involved in the production of the journal *Ronak*



December 2006, Tehran: Iranian students staging a protest against the visiting President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Student sex scandal

One of the many depressing statistics that surfaced in the wake of this year's new tuition fees regime, alongside the 15,000 absentees, was a 'shock study' by academics at Kingston University into student sex-workers. The research, which asked 130 students whether they knew others who had worked in the sex industry, suggested a 50% rise over the last six years. "One in 10 said they knew of students who had stripped, lap-danced or worked at massage parlours and escort agencies to support themselves. Just over 6% said they knew students who worked as prostitutes" (*The Sunday Times* October 8 2006).

The timescale, of course, comes as no surprise - the rise coincides completely with the introduction of tuition fees and abolition of the grant. Once again, we Cassandras on the left have had our doomy predictions confirmed.

There is more to the issue, however,

than the simple bad reflection on the admittedly-disastrous policies which caused it. The implication is that, for the first time in quite a while, the sex industry is a live issue for students. Organisations like Communist Students, moreover, have a responsibility to offer constructive support to those employed by it.

In one sense, the sex trade is a trade like any other - there are bosses and there are workers; the former exploit the latter. The workers have to organise and fight for any victories. However, in the social climate of 21st century Britain, the sex industry is unique in many ways. Prostitution exists in a semi-legal limbo, with almost everything bar the transaction itself outlawed. Even ventures as relatively innocuous as Ann Summers sex shops are heavily restricted from normal operation (famously unable to advertise in job centres). Everything is restricted ... except the exploitation, which - thanks to the difficulty in ap-

proaching the police and so on - is often intense and sometimes backed up by violence, and the indifference offered it by the state.

Unfortunately, the illegal status of sex work is actually defended by organisations of the left. The official policy of the Scottish Socialist Party - criminalising clients, not sex workers themselves - may be full of high-minded feminist rhetoric, but has little to offer a student forced into prostitution to pay the bills. The two strands of right and left moralism have reached a diabolical synthesis in Tower Hamlets with Respect's puritanical crusade against sex-clubs, which borrows rhetoric from both sides.

Such approaches to

the question are entirely counterproductive: they leave sex workers unprotected and struggling to survive since their work remains illegal. The left moralists have constructed a stereotypical prostitute who is vulnerable and utterly brutalised ... but will be return smoothly to society's mainstream if the industry that employs her is further driven underground and its owners and clients locked up. In reality, of course, the 'oldest profession' and similar work will

go on regardless - while its workers will be more marginalised and less protected.

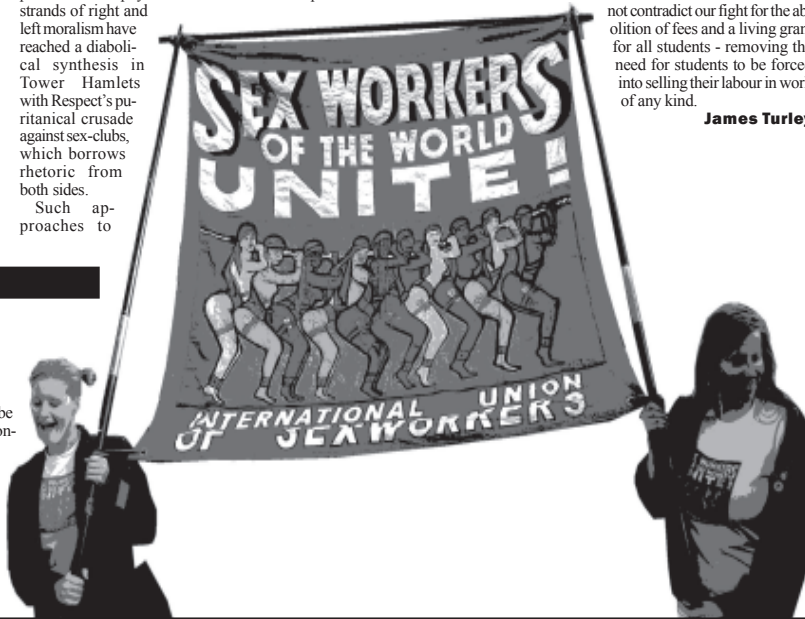
Instead of patronising sex workers, the left must demand that student unions cooperate with trade unions in aiding and encouraging their organisation - as they should with all students who have to work to finance their studies. The NUS should approach the International Union of Sex Workers and GMB union with this in mind. This does not contradict our fight for the abolition of fees and a living grant for all students - removing the need for students to be forced into selling their labour in work of any kind.

James Turley

Vote communist!

In the student union elections at Sheffield University, Communist Students will be standing five candidates for sabbatical positions and two candidates for the National Union of Students delegate elections. Unlike other left student groups, they will be standing on an openly revolutionary, socialist platform and all Communist Student readers are urged to give them as much support as possible in this crucial campaign.

The elections take place between February 27 and March 1. The campaigning officially starts on February 17 and any practical or material support would be warmly welcomed. On Monday February 26, the eve of the elections, CS Sheffield will also be hosting a meeting - 'Why vote communist?' - at 8.30pm in the Peaks meeting room, Sheffield Student Union.



Who we are & what we fight for

1. Communist Students is an autonomous organisation established by members and supporters of the Communist Party of Great Britain - but you do not have to be a member to join us. It exists to promote the ideas of Marxism, campaigns for democracy in all spheres of life and fights to replace capitalism with communism.

2. Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. This class consists not only of those in employment, but everyone who does not own or control the means of production. The majority of students in a country like Britain are therefore part of the working class.

3. The education system, the fight for women's equality, against racism, fascism, homophobia and chauvinism, and the struggle against war and for ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay and trade union rights. We fight for free abortion on demand, free 24-hour childcare, an end to the

discrimination against lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

4. Communists oppose the commodification of education and the turning of schools and universities into teaching factories. The entire education system needs to be radically transformed from top to bottom.

5. Education must be democratised, free and aimed at developing fully rounded human beings, not exploitable office droids. The situation where students are burdened with massive debts and forced to take paid work to get themselves through college must be ended. Students need time to think, argue, experiment and enjoy the experience of full time education. Grants must be set at a level that allow students to live a decent life.

6. Communists recognise the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. Marxist theory is no dogma, but must be constantly developed and enriched.

7. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality, most are confessional sects. We stand

for openness of debate and reject that members of left parties who disagree with the prescribed 'line' often have to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion. We reject all such practices as anti-democratic and alien to the method of Marxism and believe that they have produced divisions and fragmentation on the left.

8. Capitalism in its endless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis.

9. The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation in elections on all levels. Communist Students are in favour of revolutionary socialists standing in elections on a revolutionary platform. However, the working class must prepare itself to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.

10. Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system that would consign wars, exploitation, money, classes, states and nations to the history books and bring about general freedom. Socialism requires the active support of the mass of

the population and represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with the abomination that was Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

11. Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class parties and student organisations. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism and chauvinism and fight to abolish all borders. We oppose all immigration controls, believe that no one is illegal and fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrant workers.

12. At the core of any anti-fascist fight must be the mobilisation of the working class movement. We do not call on the state to ban fascist organisations. This would only give the state more repressive powers to be used against the left.

13. We oppose all forms of imperialist aggression and bullying and demand the withdrawal of all imperialist troops from the occupied territories. At the same time, we express active solidarity with the working class progressive, democratic and secular forces fighting not only the presence of imperialism, but also their own 'national' oppressors.

Join Communist Students

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Email _____

Mobile _____

Uni/college _____

Return to c/o BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX
or email your details to info@communiststudents.org.uk



Third camp comic

Tina Becker reviews Marjane Satrapi's book *Persepolis* (Jonathan Cape, 2006, pp343, £12.99)

If you haven't yet got round to reading this highly original look at a young woman's life in Iran, go and get your copy immediately! The 2006 edition encompasses two separate books: 'The story of a childhood' and 'The story of a return'. Both are currently being made into an animated film, directed by the author and financed by Sony. This is almost as surprising as the fact that the book has been put on the syllabus in 250 American universities.

Of course, the book attacks the Islamic regime in Iran, the curtailing of democracy and lack of freedom - and could undoubtedly be seen as a justification for the current pro-war propaganda. But Marjane Satrapi has been very outspoken about her opposition to the war on Iraq and a potential attack on Iran: "If you think you can build a democracy with bombs, you're not right in the head" (Cafebabel.com, January 27). "Of course this regime shouldn't have nuclear weapons. But George Bush - this madman who has invaded Iraq and made the region a hundred times more dangerous than it was before - should he have the bomb?" (*The Independent* October 1 2006).

So this book is highly original in two

ways: Firstly, it is written as a 'graphic novel' in the tradition of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. It is a comic book, essentially. And a very well done one at that. Satrapi now lives in Paris and works as a professional illustrator.

However, the real strength lies in the political outlook of the young protagonist. She is in the third camp, the camp of genuine democracy and self-liberation. She remembers how her progressive, secular parents took her (then only a small child) to demonstrations against the shah in the late 1970s. She remembers the jubilant mood at the demonstrations, the solidarity and newfound freedoms. How many people (including her) became Marxists in the struggle for liberty and democracy. In an amusing sequence, the Marx of her imagination takes the piss out of Descartes, who denies that the material world exists.

Marx takes a (very real) stone and hits Descartes over the head: "Real enough for you?"

Of course, the celebrations didn't last very long. Described from a little girl's perspective, the disappointment and fear about the beginning of the ayatollahs' reign in 1979 is chilling. As are the illusions of her communist uncle, who has "got a degree in Marxism-Leninism" from a university in the USSR. He explains to her family that they shouldn't worry about the rise of the Islamic Republic. "In a country where half the population is illiterate you cannot unite the people around Marx. The only thing that can really unite them is nationalism or a religious ethic... But the religious leaders don't know how to govern. They will return to their mosques. The proletariat shall rule! It's inevitable! That's just what Lenin ex-

plained in *State and revolution*." A few years later, her uncle was executed for being a Russian spy.

Many of the family's friends and comrades left Iran at that point to seek exile abroad. Other friends who stayed behind were arrested - some were tortured brutally, others never returned home again. Marjane's family also stayed behind, only to witness the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980. This not only brought real economic hardship for many, but also saw the strengthening of the reactionary regime.

The book is at its strongest when it describes the little things people do to cope with everyday life under the repression of the Islamic regime: how her parents tried to defend her right not to wear the veil at school; how girls showed just a bit more hair than was officially allowed; how people get

around the fact that a woman and a man can't walk together on the street if they're not married; how people danced all night at 'illegal' parties, etc.

In another amusing sequence she runs after the bus and is stopped by a revolutionary guard: "You can't run after the bus," he says, because "your behind makes movements that are obscene." Angry that she has missed her bus, she shouts back at him: "Well, don't look at my arse then."

Sometimes the book lacks a bit of subtlety and is rather tedious when she describes how she wasted four years as a confused and doped up teenager in Austria in order to show her lack of identity. The book is also not so great when it is trying to explain the reasons for the war: "The entire war was just a big set-up to destroy both the Iranian and Iraqi armies. The west sold weapons to both camps and we were stupid enough to enter into this cynical game."

But it is a graphic novel after all and a very personal view of her country's recent history. And as that it really works a treat.

Ben Lewis spoke to Ahmad Zahedi Langaroudi - a young writer and web blogger in Iran, currently involved in the production of the journal *Ronak*

The media are full of stories about Iran supplying weaponry to Shia militia in Iraq. What is your take on this?

There is no doubt that Iran's Islamic Republic (I mean the government, not the people) sends arms to Islamic groups, not only in Iraq, but throughout the world. Exactly the same as other

oppressive states, such as the US government or Israel, China or Russia. In many ways, the sale of arms is a very profitable business and a market with a prosperous future, although Iran's in-

tentions in giving arms and ammunition are often ideological.

What about the sanctions in Iran? What effects have they had on the Iranian working class and how has the regime utilised them as part of its political agenda?

Sanctions have sunk the country into unprecedented stagnation and depression, with direct consequences for the social and moral crises in Iranian society. Iran is today facing total economic devastation and dispersion. While the government is actually strengthened by the sanctions and uses them to excuse its own military activity, ordinary people face serious economic pressures.

The Iranian working class can hardly pay for its most basic needs and many are surviving by eating bread alone. It is no exaggeration to say that the current generation of workers is facing one of the worst times in our country's history. They are sacked in their tens of thousands, as factories are affected by 'economic adjustment' policies, and the only way the state has found to stop their protests and rebellion is to turn them into drug addicts.

How is the regime reacting to the threat of invasion?

War is the best hope for the Islamic regime. This government can only be propped up by war and its survival - especially with the current president, Ahmadinejad - is tied to a continued sense of crisis. What better crisis than war in order to cover up government incom-

petence and continued repression and human rights violations?

Are students able to organise?

Students in Iran are facing many challenges and the situation remains difficult for self-organisation. Many activists have been expelled from universities and others have been forced into exile over the last few years. Undoubtedly some student organisations have been infiltrated by suspicious groupings. But students are continuing to organise and many issues are being debated in depth.

What can students in Britain do to help?

All I can say to the rest of the world is that what Iran needs is not bombs and destruction, but education and better communication systems - building a school is far more constructive than war and sanctions.

War and repression

Active and committed

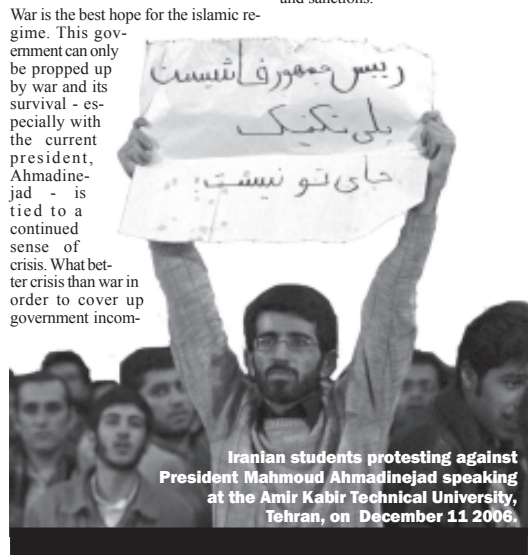
Since issue No1 of this publication members of Communist Students have been involved in a number of events and activities.

In November we distributed copies of *Communist Student* on national demonstrations against top-up fees and climate change. In December we took the message of communism and democracy to the Student Respect national conference.

Our comrade Ben Lewis stood for election to Student Respect executive and, although he didn't get elected, we certainly made an impact. Later in the same month we held our own CS launch conference, which was characterised by thoroughgoing debate on the nature of the organisation and a commitment to take the organisation onto a higher level.

In January we took a delegation of CSers to the launch conference of the Labour left Socialist Youth Network. Despite many of our members being bureaucratically barred we still managed to make an impression, proposing a motion on Iran and a number of amendments to other motions.

If you have any suggestions of events or campaigns you think Communist Students should be involved in, don't hesitate to email us at info@communiststudents.org.uk.



Iranian students protesting against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaking at the Amir Kabir Technical University, Tehran, on December 11 2006.

Communist Student

issue no 2
February 2007

How to fight the BNP

No platform for fascists

BNP leaders Nick Griffin and Mark Collett were recently cleared of inciting racial hatred at Leeds Crown Court. The results of the court case confirms the idiocy of relying on the state to deal with the BNP. It's given them publicity money just can't buy.

But what is the BNP and how should socialists fight it?

The BNP isn't just a rightwing, racist cult. They're a fascist organisation and this means they want to destroy their opponents. In the past BNP supporters have fire-bombed Asian homes, beaten up lesbians and gay men, attacked socialists, Irish republicans and anti-fascist campaigners. If they came to power, these attacks would become institutionalised. This the lesson of Hitler and the Nazis.

Some people believe in defending 'free speech' for the BNP. But the BNP is modelled on Hitler's Nazi Party: they'll only use it to deny the free speech of everyone else. They believe in expelling non-whites from Britain. How can this be achieved? Only by extreme violence. The BNP denies the right of lesbians and gays to enjoy loving relationships. They believe a women's place is 'in the home'. They want to solve the 'problem' of Jews and of people with disabilities. We know how the Nazis did this when they were in power. The BNP would be no different, given a chance. We must deny them the right to spread their hatred and lies.

So how to fight the fascists?

The strategy of Unite Against Fascism boils down to appealing to the state to deal with the BNP or, as the UAF convenor puts it, "turn BNP into HMP". Not only is such a strategy extremely dangerous, as any new legislation brought in by the state will in all likelihood be used against the left, but by refusing to build a militant anti-fascist movement they demoralise their own supporters.

Instead, we need militant anti-fascist mobilisations based on the organised labour movement to physically confront the BNP when they seek to demonstrate or hold public meetings. Two years ago, when Jean-Marie Le Pen visited Manchester to promote the BNP election campaign, he was prevented from getting his message across by a mass mobilisation which was reported across Europe. That action was condemned by the UAF speaker on the day, but it showed what's possible. It showed we can build a mass movement willing to take the direct action needed to deny the fascists a platform.

We also need to fight the BNP at the ballot box. Any electoral success emboldens the BNP and leads both to increased racist attacks and to attacks on leftwing and anti-fascist activists, as in the recent attack on UAF supporters in Morley.

We should support working class candidates, including Labour Party candidates, against the BNP, as part of building up a workers' united front

One of the most controversial debates in the run-up to the founding conference of Communist Students was on the question of fascism and the British National Party, and what the response of revolutionaries should be. The conference adopted a resolution highlighting the necessity of basing any anti-fascist fight on the "mobilisation of the working class movement" rather than calling upon the state to ban fascist organisations. We nevertheless recognised that there are differences within our organisation on this particular question and have therefore opened it up for discussion and debate. Here we present two contrasting views

against fascism. Such a united front of trade unions, Labour Party and all workers' organisations cannot include bosses' parties. The UAF line of 'Vote for anyone but the BNP' undermines the necessary direct mass working class action needed.

The BNP are not an ordinary party: they're a violent fascist organisation, so the ordinary methods of political debate are not sufficient. Only the strategy of mass mobilisation, based on the organised labour movement, can defeat the BNP.

Jim Padmore

Principle or tactic?

Comrade Jim Padmore's approach to the BNP is, in my opinion, deeply flawed.

To his credit, he doesn't call upon the British state to ban the BNP, as do organisations like Unite Against Fascism. This would merely give the state the ability to decide which ideas are acceptable and which are not - with potentially disastrous consequences for the workers' movement. The UAF in that sense is behaving like turkeys voting for Christmas - wanting the state to adopt powers that could be used against them, and would undoubtedly be used against the working class movement when our rulers deem it necessary.

Jim is, however, no different from the rest of the left in his insistence that there is one tactic, and one tactic alone, which must be used against far-right organisations like the BNP. This is because, he says, fascists "want to destroy their opponents" and "deny the free speech of everyone else". This leads him, through an enormous leap of logic, to suppose that the *only* option for militant opponents of the fascists is to deny them any platform whatsoever.

In actual fact it is legitimate to ask whether the BNP can truly be described as fascist in 2007. The BNP is clearly not, as comrade Padmore claims, "modelled on Hitler's Nazi Party." If anything, the opposite is true, with the BNP's idiotic leader, Nick

Griffin, emphasising that his mob should actually be looking to swap the "boots for the suits" - distancing the BNP from its violent past and removing all references to Hitler and Nazism.

The term 'fascism' is not something that should be thrown around willy-nilly. It has specific historical content and broadly represents the victory of counterrevolution in a revolutionary period. We clearly do not live in either a revolutionary period or the "1930s in slow motion" (but accelerating), as the Socialist Workers Party would have it. There are no fighting squads or militias and there is no dissolution of the existing social relations to the point where the right is mobilising the disillusioned in order to prevent the working class taking power and seeking to establish its dystopian white dictatorship.

The leaders of the BNP and its antecedents once openly proclaimed such an aim. However, today its policies on such questions as immigration and 'law and order' are not so far removed from those of the mainstream - look at them carefully and you are bound to conclude it is often just a matter of degree.

The BNP still has fascists and Hitler-glorifiers among its leading members, and its aims are completely reactionary and anti-human. But fascism represents something qualitatively different from what the BNP is actually putting forward in practice - a populist appeal to the dispossessed and disillusioned of a Britain that is dominated by finance capital and characterised by pseudo-democracy. With its half-truths the BNP seeks to deflect the genuine sentiment for change and a radical restructuring of society and channel them into chauvinism and racism.

However, whether it is still correct to define the BNP as fascist is not the main question. The main question is whether it is correct, despite the well-meaning militancy of many who advocate 'no platform' in every circumstance, to turn a particular *tactic* into a political *principle* in order to counter the threat of the far right. For all its drum-beating, Jim's approach is more indicative of political weakness than political strength.

The mass mobilisation of the working class to prevent reactionaries gaining an audience can certainly bring results. For example, in 1936 the Communist Party, with all its defects, was able to mobilise working people in the East End to stop

Oswald Moseley's British Union of Fascists, After the Battle of Cable Street the BUF was marginalised as a political force and never quite recovered.

But today there is no Communist Party - of any description. Which makes it all the more crucial for us to *win the battle of ideas*. That will often mean allowing reactionary arguments to come out in the open, where they can be soundly defeated. If there is a debate in the media or at a public event at which a BNP representative is one of the speakers, it may prove tactically stupid to boycott or attempt to disrupt it. Such a tactic always risks allowing the BNP to portray itself as the 'true democrats' and the left as would-be dictators.

Meanwhile partisans of the working class may miss an opportunity to rubish the incoherence and idiocy of the BNP's politics. What are we afraid of? Are the arguments of the BNP so powerful that, as soon as the majority of workers or students hear them, they will be won over to its ideas? And are our own Marxist ideas of democracy and socialism so impotent that the majority will always reject them?

If a popular elected officer of your student union suddenly announced they had joined the BNP, what would you do? Organise a boycott of the union premises? Try to stop the officer getting into the building? Or would you demand an emergency general meeting, where everyone - including the new BNP recruit - could have their say, and propose a motion of no confidence and fresh elections?

Communists must be intransigent in defence of their principles, but infinitely flexible in their choice of tactics.

Benjamin Klein

Want to join in the debate? Send in your comments to: info@communiststudents.org.uk and we will publish your ideas on our website.

Get in touch



Ben 07890 437 497
www.communiststudents.org.uk
info@communiststudents.org.uk
c/o BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX