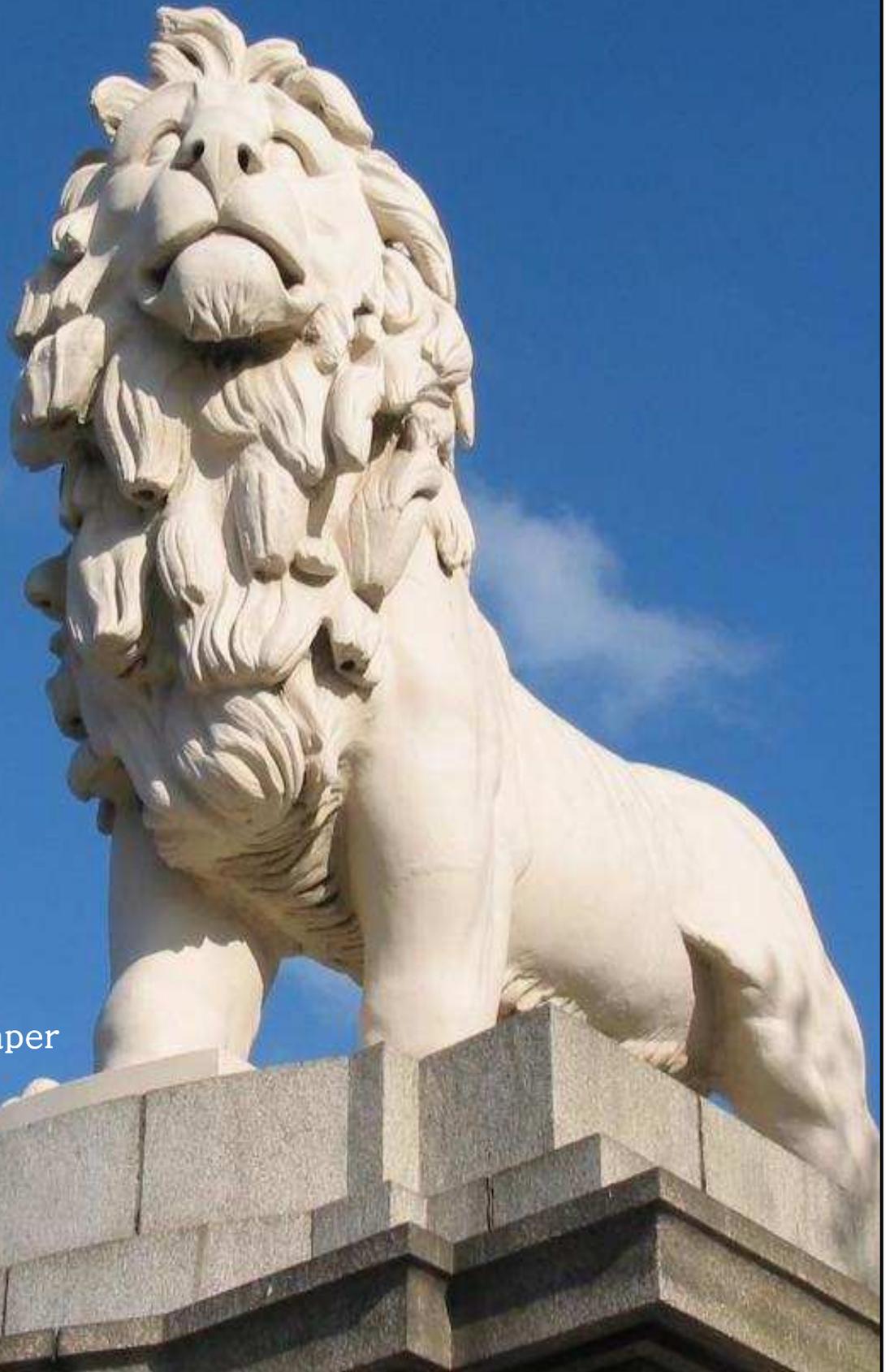


# BNP – The ugly truth

By Charles Walker MP

A Cornerstone Paper



Despite a disastrous performance in terms of new seats gained (early analysis of results suggests a net gain of one has already been cancelled out by a defection in Stoke) at the recent May 3<sup>rd</sup> Poll in England and Wales, the BNP continues to retain a toehold in British politics. Of course, we should not over play the importance of a political movement that struggles to hold its deposit at general elections and still only has a handful of councillors. However, having polled over 300,000 votes in the English local elections and 42,000 votes in the Welsh Assembly poll, the night was not a total washout for Mr Griffin and his colleagues. Such is the creeping malevolence of the BNP, it would be grossly negligent of mainstream political parties if they did not take the threat it poses seriously. One only has to look across the Channel towards mainland Europe to realise that wishing fascists away does not work.

The BNP had been emboldened by its November 2006 courtroom success that saw its Leader Nick Griffin cleared of preaching and promoting racial hatred. The prosecution of Griffin was wholly misconceived and looked likely to end in failure from the moment charges were laid. It can only be hoped that lessons have been learnt by the “establishment” and such cack-handedness will be avoided in the future.

Despite the continued efforts of Griffin to reposition his party away from its thuggish past, the BNP remains a deeply flawed and racist organisation. Those who dare criticise it will often find their names posted on websites such as *Red Watch* and *Stormfront* and become the subject of fevered online discussions between white supremacists. Indeed, the relationship between these ultra-fascist websites and the BNP is too overt to ignore and strongly suggests that the BNP continues to be the legitimate political wing of the “skinhead” faction. We need to make this connection in the minds of those self-professed “decent” people who feel, in their words, “forced” into voting

for the BNP as a way of registering their frustration at the mainstream political parties.

The BNP's recent electoral advance in terms of votes polled, if not council seats gained, suggests that Nick Griffin has had some further success in advancing his party's appeal beyond the BNP's traditional base of racist misfits and hangers-on. The continued concern surrounding Islamic fundamentalism and the real or perceived unwillingness of the Government to talk sensibly about immigration and integration (outside the four weeks that precede polling day) has undoubtedly fuelled "doorstep" support for the BNP and its opportunistic scaremongering. There is a misplaced belief amongst sections of the electorate that the BNP has left its unsavoury racist past behind. However, as the extraordinary rant of BNP web columnist, Lee Barnes, demonstrates this is far from the actual reality.

*"Political correctness is directly responsible for the rising number of mental health cases in the West. If someone bothered to do the research they would find that those of the far left who are proponents of political correctness and anti-racist activists are more likely to be alcoholics, sexually promiscuous, take more anti depressants, attempt suicide , self harm, self medicate with drugs and suffer more mental illness. This is because they live a life based on the lies they are taught to believe in rather than what they actually feel. They are half human, living on the ever cracking ice of their own submerged selves that threatens to drown them in a sudden psychosis.*

*"This self hatred manifests itself in many ways – it may be that the individual seeks to submerge himself and his self identity into an ethnic culture, religious cult or to campaign for the political or social rights of ethnics whilst ignoring their own people living in doorways in their own streets. The sight of young white people in our high streets trying to get us to sign up and*

*subscribe to charities that seek to fund and support foreigners and aliens is the surest sign that they have inherited the sickness of their masters. As they campaign for Africans they ignore the white beggars dying mere feet from them.*

*"It may be that the white self hater wishes to marry into ethnic groups and destroy their self and their racial identity through miscegenation or it may manifest itself as a refusal to have children or devoting their lives to caring for adopted ethnic children or building hospitals in Gambia for example. Either way the repressed true and natural self creates for itself an artificial reality in which the emotional content of the soul is affixed onto an ethnic group that is different from itself."* (BNP columnist, Lee Barnes, <http://www.bnp.org.uk/columnists/brimstone2.php?leelId=76>)

Mr Barnes gives a fascinating insight into the perverse machinations of the BNP's "thought leaders". It is clear that their hatred stretches well beyond people of different colours and creeds to those who subscribe to a different set of beliefs or suffer from mental illness. In reality, the BNP loathes and despises the vast majority of the UK's population.

Given the above, it is difficult to imagine from where the BNP is deriving its support. However, from doorstep conversations, one quickly gauges that the BNP's best recruiting sergeants are a) the public's growing disenchantment with mainstream politicians ("you're all the same aren't you") and b) the Government's inability to get a handle on immigration. (Senior politicians must discipline themselves to not just address these concerns in the few weeks before polling day – if anything late and well publicised interventions on the issue of immigration and "Britishness" may actually enhance the BNP's support by pitching the immediate pre-election debate on its favoured territory. A responsible Government and Opposition should be discussing the

electorate's concerns in a calm and measured fashion throughout the year, as part of their national policy agenda.)

The perceived failings of the political classes combined with the electorate's increasing anxiety about the allocation of scarce public resources has provided the BNP with enough campaigning "cover" to dilute attention away from its core political ideology. An ideology which, as Mr Barnes demonstrates so unpleasantly, remains firmly anchored in the area of race.

The BNP's hostility to immigration has struck a seam of growing discontent amongst a section of the electorate who believe that mainstream politicians have walked away from their concerns. However, Griffin's positioning on immigration is horribly disingenuous because it so obviously serves his political ambitions for the current failings to continue. He knows full well that tighter border controls and entry requirements would severely retard the Party's progress. Once separated away from the public's concerns over immigration where would the BNP go? It would probably be forced back to running campaigns based around its core ideology of race and ethnicity, a strategy that served it so poorly for so long.

Of course, in their desire to drive the BNP back to their hardcore hinterland, the main political Parties must avoid the trap of trying to out bid them when it comes to sounding tough on immigration and integration. While the concerns raised by the Cabinet Minister, Jack Straw in regards to the wearing of the veil where wholly legitimate, we must avoid being sidetracked by the veil debate. From a Conservative perspective, we should be less bothered by what people choose to wear and more concerned as to whether they respect our laws and our values; tolerance and freedom of thought and expression. Although it will require more hard work, tackling internal cultural hostilities

towards our values will ultimately pay higher dividends than taking on those who choose to display visible expressions of their faith or modesty.

In looking to tackle the BNP politicians should operate an 80/20 rule. This rule is unscientific but as a rough benchmark 80% of the BNP's vote comes from those who feel forgotten by the mainstream Parties and therefore are not beyond retrieval. However, 20% of the BNP's support is probably core and is derived from hard-line bigots who have no political interest beyond race and colour. It is this vocal minority who write spiteful letters to local newspapers and will never be appeased. They will always try to up the stakes and no attempt should be made to satisfy them.

In separating the issue of immigration from the BNP, politicians and to a large extent the popular media need to accept that people have a legitimate right to raise their concerns without the fear of being tarred with the brush of racism. It is encouraging to see that Trevor Phillips, the former Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, understands the importance of such a move as a necessary stage in the process of deflating growing tensions between various communities. A frank and open exchange of views is often what is required to clear the air and is the hallmark of a strong democracy. (It is disappointing to note that prior to the welcome intervention of Trevor Phillips, any attempt over the past decade by serious politicians and commentators to question the wisdom of high levels of immigration and the consequences of unmanaged multi-culturalism were invariably denounced as being racist. It is highly probable that the placing of these subjects "out of bounds" for mainstream politicians has contributed to the BNP's ability to make electoral advances. In future, our elected representatives must not be so easily cowed.)

As its few, overwhelmingly low grade and troubled, councillors have proved in office, the BNP is all about rhetoric. It is the duty of Government and mainstream politicians to be all about action. The leaders of this country must be seen to restore faith in our institutions and borders. This process will not happen overnight. The concerns that have led to the BNP's increased support built up over time and, if the Government of the day gets it right, should subside over time.

Regardless from where it is deriving its support, politicians from the three main parties share a duty to stem the BNP's slow but continuing rise. We can start this process by reinforcing our commitment to fairness and justice.

Firstly, the UK's laws must be applied equally and without favour. Those who choose to live in the UK must be left in no doubt that they are expected to live by the law of the land – no exceptions – what is good for one is good for all.

Secondly, when it comes to the allocation of public resources, government and local Authorities must be able to demonstrate that the system overwhelmingly favours those who play by the rules, wait their turn and most importantly have paid into the system. Ensuring that public services are visibly meeting the needs of established local communities will erode the BNP's ability to play on people's fears of being "left out".

Thirdly, Politicians must place good race relations at the heart of the UK's immigration policy. Our immigration policy is failing if it creates high-levels of concern and disquiet amongst the existing population (regardless of their ethnicity). Critically, immigration is not only (or mainly) an economic issue. Immigration must work for the good of all, not just part of our society.

In addition to politicians taking the lead, there is also a role for the press. At times, our media seems determined to stoke up animosity and resentment by sensationalising the debate – at its happiest when either shouting down those with legitimate concerns or injecting the heat into disagreements. Too often the media polarises discussions on race, religion and ethnicity by choosing to interview the most undesirable bigots and religious militants. It does this replete in the knowledge that these people are totally unrepresentative of their relative communities but will make good copy and viewing.

In the run up to the May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2007 poll, the BNP challenge for seats received substantial media coverage which at times was both sensationalist and out of proportion to the still small electoral appeal of this fringe Party. The *Times* feature on Nick Griffin, just two weeks before polling, was made all the more repellent by its portrayal of Griffin as just as some kind of “regular Joe” trying to do the right thing! Unsurprisingly, come the morning of May 4th, the BNP’s failure to make headway, in terms of the number of seats won, secured very few column inches as the story no longer fitted the “news” agenda

When it comes to discussing immigration and race relations, it is time for the media to rise to the occasion by encouraging and reporting an informed, open and wide-ranging debate on these important matters. Ensuring that, more often than not, sober voices of moderation from both sides of the debate are heard and not the shrill shouts from the fringe. In pursuit of this objective, would it be expecting too much for the press to exercise a certain degree of self-discipline when it comes to reporting on the activities of the BNP?

From an electoral perspective, the rise of the BNP has not been as damaging to the Conservative Party as it has to the Labour Party. Of around 48 BNP councillors after the May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2007 Poll, more than 40 had taken Labour seats.

This suggests that Labour's traditional working class voters are feeling most impacted by the social and economic consequences of increased levels of immigration. It may also point to the fact that behind the headlines of race and religion, the BNP's policies are both protectionist and socialist – promising to return the UK to an age more reminiscent of the 1950's than the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed, there are many similarities between the manifestos of the BNP and the Respect Party, founded by George Galloway MP. In demonstrating a shared loathing for capitalism, both manifestos call for the re-nationalisation of public services, an end to globalisation, the tighter regulation of big business and high levels of economic protection.

Regardless of where it is securing its vote, depriving the BNP of its growing support is a battle worth fighting. To challenge the BNP at a national level, the Conservative Party needs to better project its commitment to an immigration policy which is just, fair and effective. A policy which celebrates the contributions many immigrants have made to the UK's success and prosperity but one which also recognises that many of the benefits of immigration will be undermined if high levels of new settlement in the UK result in the erosion of social cohesion and our shared values of tolerance and compassion.

The Conservative Party must demonstrate that it possesses a clear understanding that immigration has far reaching implications across whole areas of public policy and the “sharing out” of public services. Any immigration policy which the public perceive to be solely managed in the interests of business at the expense of workers, families and communities will simply not carry the confidence of the electorate.

Furthermore, we need to commit to creating a society which encourages and rewards full participation from those minorities that have chosen to call the

UK home. Such participation can only be secured if we have the courage to dismantle the cultural barriers that politicians have allowed to be thrown up over the past forty years in the unquestioning pursuit of multiculturalism. These barriers, which too often separate communities into ghettos, actively work against minorities by excluding them from the economic and social opportunities offered by mainstream Britain. The Conservatives must not offer a false prospectus, we must be upfront and honest when it comes to placing expectations on those who choose to live in the UK. We must enable all those living in this country to look beyond the “familiar” and in so doing allow them to make a positive and well received contribution to society as a whole.

Politically the Conservative Party should not shy away from positioning the BNP as another Party of the left operating in an increasingly crowded space populated by Labour, the Liberal Democrats, Respect and the Greens. All of these parties favour high-levels of state intervention, big government and top down problem solving. As the allocation of its few council seats suggests, the BNP is not the natural home of Conservative-minded voters and the party must work and campaign to ensure that this remains the case.

Despite its left of centre leanings, the BNP still hankers after Conservative seats and is increasingly standing against the party's councillors. In rebutting the BNP's electoral ambitions, the party needs to guard against being drawn into the type of campaign the BNP wants to fight.

The golden scenario for BNP strategists is to draw Conservative candidates into constantly rebuffing its naked and blatant scaremongering, which links every local problem to immigrants and immigration. Engaging with the BNP on its narrow territory allows it to set the tone of the ensuing debate. BNP candidates are aware the electoral advantage to be had from positioning

themselves as the outsiders – fighting what they proclaim to be the “corrupt” establishment. Well intentioned efforts by Labour and Conservative canvassers to point out the absurd unpleasantness of the BNP to disillusioned members of the electorate are all too often met with the response “*well you would say that wouldn't you mate*”.

Therefore when taking on the BNP at a local government level, the Conservatives should fight upbeat campaigns which resolutely reinforces the local nature of the contest and the record of our sitting councillor or candidate. However, we must never shy away from challenging the BNP.

It is on the doorstep that the BNP positions itself as the voters “friend” and its canvassers play heavily on being matey, local activists whose sole and saintly political motive is to give a voice to the concerns of ordinary (white) people. At a time of dwindling turnout and waning confidence in the political establishment, this approach clearly has attractions to those who want to register a protest vote against the local or national party of government. To be successful in countering BNP propaganda, Conservatives need to demonstrate that they are both acting on people's concerns and working twice as hard to secure the votes of an increasingly jaundiced and apathetic electorate. If the BNP deliver four leaflets, the Conservatives need to deliver eight. When it comes to beating the BNP there is no substitute for shoe leather and sweat! We must rediscover our campaigning zeal and let it be known that we value our constituents and their vote.

At a national level, the BNP support base will be eroded if the three main political parties start addressing the public's growing concerns about increasing levels of immigration and the impact that this is having on the allocation of public resources and structure of existing communities. In tackling these concerns, politicians must not be drawn into “bidding” for the

BNP vote. We must trust that reasoned arguments supported by demonstrable action to restore confidence in the system will persuade the “soft” 80% of the BNP vote to return to the mainstream while reluctantly accepting that the “hardcore” 20% is beyond the reach of decent and principled political parties.

Ultimately, Nick Griffin and his friends will fail because the British public will never be able to square the BNP’s hateful and destructive rhetoric with its professed desire to serve an electorate which on almost every count is despises; a massive and insurmountable contradiction.