



**BNP Briefing Paper  
- A Church Response -  
Revised for the June 2010  
Local & General Elections**

# Introduction

Many churches and faiths groups have been very concerned by the growing presence of extremist parties in local elections and their threat to community cohesion. Since this briefing paper was first published for the local elections in spring 2004, the need for churches and the faith sector to take an active role in their communities to respond to political extremism has become more apparent. The British National Party (BNP) has had very significant increases in our region, especially gaining growing support in 2009 in Barnsley and Rotherham, and currently the party has local councillors in Rotherham, Leeds, Calderdale, Kirklees and Bradford. They also won a seat in the European election in our region to represent Yorkshire and Humber.

Over the past few years the BNP has seriously contested council elections all over the country and now has 57 councillors. The two BNP MEPs elected in June 2009, one in Yorkshire and Humber, and one in the Northwest, have brought the party financial benefit in the form of their salaries and staffing and expenses allowances, as well as an opportunity for Nick Griffin, the BNP leader, further to develop his links with other European fascist parties. However without campaigns by the churches, and others, such as the HOPE not hate campaign, the BNP would undoubtedly have had more MEPs and many more local councillors elected. Now the BNP is threatening to gain a majority on Barking and Dagenham council, in east London, and Griffin is trying to become MP for Barking. The party is also faced with defending 30 of its council seats in 2010, which also gives an opportunity to oust them.

Sine 2006 the BNP have said their aim is to “Defend Christian Values”, and have sought to link ‘race and nation’, whilst stirring up fear of Islam by talking about the ‘Islamification’ of Britain. The BNP’s growing success feeds on the fears of many who feel threatened by changes in our communities, such as the visible rise in the presence of diverse faith communities and migrant populations.

How can churches and faith communities actively reduce the impact of extremist groups? A skilled and co-ordinated long-term response is necessary to offset the impact of political extremism and the easy and destructive answers to complex questions that they offer. This paper has been published by the **Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber (CRC)** as part of their commitment to equip the diverse faith communities to respond to the needs of their local communities. It outlines the latest issues relevant to the 2010 campaign, provides information on planning an effective response and tries to provide some context on the issues.

**Liz Carnelley**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Churches Regional Commission**  
**For Yorkshire and the Humber**

*“The BNP may present its election message as ‘Christian’, but as it is based on the divisive and racist agenda inherent to that party, it is clearly out of step with the message of freedom and belonging that is central to the Christian faith.”*

**Revd Katei Kirby, African and Caribbean Evangelical Alliance**

## What does the BNP stand for?

In recent years the BNP has tried to present itself as a "respectable" alternative to the mainstream parties, yet its manifesto is openly based on racism. For example, if elected, BNP Councillors are committed to removing halal and kosher food from school dinner menus. The BNP justifies this proposed victimisation of Muslim and Jewish children by saying it is opposed to animal cruelty. The BNP is also committed to introducing quota systems on the issuing of licences to private hire firms and off-licences. This would deprive thousands of Asian people in Yorkshire of their livelihoods. The BNP's declared policy is "an immediate halt to all non-white immigration" and "the voluntary resettlement" of non-whites to "their lands of native origin." BNP leaders Nick Griffin has described the Holocaust as the "holohoax," denying the deaths of millions of Jewish people in Nazi gas chambers. Recently (April 2009) Nick Griffin has called immigration a "bloodless genocide" and defended the BNP view that Black and Asian British people should be classed as "racial foreigners" – just because they are born in Britain "they are not a Briton". The Archbishop of York John Sentamu (who was a refugee from Idi Amin's Uganda) has described these claims as "beyond belief".

The BNP is making direct attempts to win over Christians. It has established a "front" organisation, the "Christian Council of Britain". Supporters during Nick Griffin's trial in Leeds in 2006 brandished placards stating "Defending Christian Values". One wore a clerical dog collar, though he refused to say which church he represented. The Christian Council of Britain led by 'Revd' Robert West has addressed BNP meetings and was the subject of TV reports during the 2006 campaign. A former Conservative councillor, doubt over his status as a clergyman was cast when their head office denied his ordination in the Apostolic Church last year. He has set up his own church, based in a house in Holbeach, to preach "traditional bible beliefs". In response to the activities of the Christian Council of Britain, **Anthea Cox, former Methodist Coordinating Secretary for Public Life and Social justice**, said, "*I am outraged that the BNP and its allies are using Christianity to further their agenda of segregation and division. We are deeply concerned that some people are now appropriating Christian language and symbols for policies that are the very opposite of Christian values*". (See: <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr3306a.html>)

### **CHURCH OF ENGLAND BANS CLERGY FROM BNP**

On 10<sup>th</sup> February 2009 the General Synod, more than 300 of the 418 members gathered in Westminster endorsed a **motion asking the house of Bishops to keep the BNP members out of the church**. In a 90-minute debate, Vasantha Gnanadoss, who proposed the motion and is one of a handful of ethnic minority synod members, said: "*Passing this motion is a push that is seriously necessary. Without it, the day may come when the BNP will have gained significant power and the church will stand accused of having been feeble when it could have been resolute.*" The motion received support from the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/feb/10/general-synod-bnp-vote>

The BNP are also developing other “front” organisations to develop support, gain credibility and even to raise funds. The BNP has established ‘Civil Liberty’ a lawyers association, and ‘Solidarity’ a trade union led by Clive Potter, a long-time BNP activist. An investigation by the Guardian in February 2007 has revealed that the fundraising group Civil Liberty, which claims to be independent of any political party, is run by key BNP activists with all the money donated through its website going to the BNP's regional headquarters in the north-east. The investigation raised concerns that the party appears to be attempting to profit from anti-Islamic sentiment in the United States since the attacks of September 11 2001, by presenting itself as being at the forefront of a campaign to save the UK from being "overwhelmed" by Muslims. Since 2001 it has been illegal for any political party to accept overseas donations of more than £200, and party officials breaking the law face a year's imprisonment or a £5,000 fine. Both Civil Liberty and the BNP deny they are trying to bypass UK election law, insisting they are entirely separate organisations. However, the Guardian has established a series of links, including an audio tape of the BNP chairman, Nick Griffin, speaking at a US conference organised by a former member of the Ku Klux Klan, in which he calls on sympathisers to support BNP members by giving money to Civil Liberty.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/feb/03/partyfunding.thefarright>

Recently a soldiers’ “charitable” group has been formed, ‘Soldiers off the Street’, which is thought to be another front BNP organisation, see

<http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/News/DailyBulletin/978017/New-charity-Soldiers-off-Street-front-BNP-campaign-group-claims/A1324111302BC7E5CA475D2C62192AEA/?DCMP=EMC-DailyBulletin>

*“As leaders of different churches in West Yorkshire we affirm the values of unity, tolerance, hospitality and mutual respect, which have always helped people from different backgrounds to live together. We are deeply concerned at the views and activities of the British National Party which is using people’s fears to stir up racial and religious hate. We assert that all human beings are created equally in the image of God, that racism is a sin and that such extremist groups do not speak for Christians”.*

**West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council April 2009**

The BNP are not afraid to use physical aggression, and I know personally two people who were assaulted by BNP activists whilst giving out election pamphlets.

### **What kind of people vote BNP?**

We need to be careful not to demonise people – many people vote as a protest – that they are not being heard. They are often those who resent others apparently receiving more. Research has been done to look at the sources of resentment in disadvantaged white communities.

**See:** <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/sourcesresentment>

We will find these people with a vague sympathy or support for the BNP in our churches, and it is a myth they are always in traditionally disadvantaged white working class areas, or in very mixed areas. We need to understand why they feel they are not being heard. They feel let down by the mainstream parties and that they are losing some of their safety, their culture, their identity. Where local leadership fails or is weak, the BNP exploit this. They often seek protest votes on particular issues such as perceived unfairness in housing allocation.

The BNP can have strong support in places which are largely white but near areas which are predominantly Asian, like Queensbury near Bradford, Clitheroe near Blackburn, and Heanor near Derby. These areas are associated with “white flight”, the retreat of the white middle class from inner city areas, which Trevor Phillips of the Equality and Human Rights Commission said in January 2008 is getting worse. See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1575660/White-flight-increasing-race-chief-says.html>

#### **Exploiting Divisions**

*The Medina Islamic Education Centre received planning permission for a mosque in Clitheroe after a 30-year campaign. It will include a multi-faith education centre. A local set to vote for the BNP was quoted in the Guardian. “I am not racist but I don’t think they should have given permission. It will lead to more Muslims coming to live here and we’ll end up like Blackburn.”*

See: <http://www.society.guardian.co.uk/communities/story/0,,2059097,00.html>

The recent release online of the BNP membership list, in 2009, provided a glimpse into the membership make-up. There are 12,801 individuals named in this list, who seem at least to have expressed an interest in becoming members of the British National Party. The geographical statistics are significant. Yorkshire as a whole has more than 1,600 BNP supporters, including 263 in Leeds, 164 in Kirklees, 190 in Bradford and more than 100 each in Barnsley, Sheffield and Wakefield.

*“We must look instead for political leadership that is committed to healing divisions, bridging differences and creating truly inclusive community.”*

***The Catholic Bishops’ Conference***

A recent television programme entitled “BNP Wives” provides an insight into the mind-set of some of their members. **See:**

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-6145793487676011977>

The BNP feeds off a sense of alienation and exploits any policy vacuum. Their appeal is strongest whenever there is a sense of a scramble around limited resources. There is a real fear the credit crunch will bear down on jobs and pay, push up unemployment and intensify competition for scarce resources, and that that will create a more fertile ground for the BNP to operate in. Faith communities need to provide forums for people to express their views, for accurate information to be shared and myths to be busted.

Many faiths are already active at grassroots level, working alongside their neighbours to heal divisions and offer an alternative to the politics of blame and hatred, which racist parties offer. Such organisations often exploit people who feel alienated and undervalued by mainstream politicians, especially in a climate of uncertainty. To love and care for people who might otherwise turn to parties such as the BNP, acknowledge what is positive about their cultural identity and tackle the real problems which communities face can do much to undermine the far right. By intensifying such efforts, as well as making it clear that racism is unacceptable, the faith community can help to bring hope to troubled neighbourhoods, and offer a positive alternative to the poison peddled by the BNP.

***Ian Drummond, Baptist Minister and CRC Board member***

## 2010 Elections

The European Elections in 2009 provided a breakthrough for the BNP but this was based on a low turnout. A higher turnout is likely to give more support to the mainstream parties, and therefore it is vital that people vote.

Andrew Brons was elected as an MEP for Yorkshire and Humber. He was previously a member of the National Front and believed that non-whites should be forcibly repatriated. He now says his views have “matured”, and accepts this would have to be ‘voluntary’. However he still argues there is no such thing as Black British or Asian British, and caused controversy by saying that Dame Kelly Holmes, the double Olympic gold medal winner, is not fully British (as she is of mixed-race heritage). See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/politics/5524684/Kelly-Holmes-is-not-fully-British-says-BNP-MEP-Andrew-Brons.html>

In the 2009 European election, which was based on proportional representation, the BNP received more than 120,140 votes in our region, around 10% of the vote. This was actually slightly less votes than in 2004 but the Labour vote collapsed, with a very low turnout. In South Yorkshire, traditionally a Labour heartland, the BNP won 16% of the vote in Barnsley, 12% in Doncaster, and 15% in Rotherham.

Even when the BNP do not win, their campaigning in local communities stir up bad feeling, dissent and divisions, as they spread myths about issues and often campaign on things that are genuine local grievances. This year they will again focus on immigration as a key issue.

*"In any kind of economic downturn, it is incumbent on us all to be putting across exactly the same message about the value and importance of having... diversity in communities; about the value and benefit of people from different countries coming and creating wealth.*

*"There are reasons we have to support that and not to get trapped into what the extremists would like, which would be to take their simplistic approach and fit it into a very complicated situation. So I hope that people will just reject as nonsense the idea that the solution lies in some kind of xenophobic attitude to people who live, work, study or travel in our country, because they bring to the economy far more than they take out"*

*"The extremists have always relied on economic downturns ... as a way of recruiting people to what can be seen as a simple message,  
**but actually it is just hatred**"*

***Lady Ashton – EU Trade Commissioner***

## What can we do?

A skilled and co-ordinated long-term response is necessary. It is also important to form broad alliances with those whose tone and methods fit with the churches – those which are locally-based can be very effective.

- ❑ We need to give out facts and figures to contradict the myths and rumours: For example, the myth that migrants are “flooding” the UK. The recent immigration figures published on February 2009 show that the flow of Polish and other economic migrants from eastern Europe has fallen by more than 40% as the recession in Britain takes hold. The Office for National Statistics has said the number of work applications from the EU's former communist countries dropped to 29,000 in the last three months of 2008, down from 53,000 in the same period in 2007. Many have returned home. Since 2000 around 30,000 asylum seekers have been dispersed into our region of around 5 million people – this is 0.6% of the region's population. (Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Yorkshire and the Humber, 1999-2008, Yorkshire Futures, the University of Hull and the Regional Migration Partnership).
- ❑ Working with the media and local press is vital to have a co-ordinated response. Positive stories are needed to combat myths and rumours, especially around immigration.
- ❑ Events need to bring people together – organising events for people who otherwise wouldn't visit a mosque, encouraging walks of friendship, events by faith forums, vigils, and celebrations in local community venues.
- ❑ There need to be spaces to raise hard issues and to let the diverse voices of communities be heard. There can be Forums where local people can meet with councillors and other representatives of the statutory authorities with a neutral chair to voice their concerns, and also to indicate potential solutions to local issues.
- ❑ People need to turn out and vote – a higher vote means less chance of a BNP victory.

*In the end the BNP is only going to be defeated at the ballot box, not by banning them. I will encourage everybody to exercise their democratic right to vote.”*

**Archbishop Sentamu**

- ❑ Other Political parties need to be encouraged not to “play the race card” or focus solely on immigration in marginal seats;
- ❑ The Church needs to say that it does not support the BNP since some BNP members often claim that they are of Christian faith;

*The Church of England today voted overwhelmingly in favour of banning clergy from belonging to the British National Party. On the second day of the General Synod, the legislative body that meets twice a year, more than 300 of the 418 members gathered in Westminster endorsed a motion asking the House of Bishops to keep BNP members out of the church.*

**The Guardian Tuesday 10 February 2009 – “The Church of England Votes To Ban BNP Clergy”**

- ❑ Statements from faith leaders promoting racial/religious harmony can be useful. Statements like this can be found on the websites listed below under resources.
- ❑ Be aware of the beliefs and activities of parties, groups and individuals who are active in your community
- ❑ Local events can change the mood – prayers for peace, school events, walks, vigils etc.

“In a divided world we need to be seen as united in our desire for all communities to live in peace and harmony. This is a walk of witness to our hope”

***Bishop Jack who walked with local faith leaders to areas in Sheffield where the BNP are trying to gain a foothold.***

- ❑ Many Christian denominations and groups produce useful resources and statements. See below for very helpful practical information mainly on the web. This will help us all to be more aware.

In the long-term, opposition to such parties requires broad coalitions rooted in the life of the local community and committed to long-term effective engagement. If churches are to be part of the healing of these communities then their ordained and lay leadership needs to be out and about in the local community and engaged with its local leaders, working together to address local concerns....the church can play a key role in building community trust and respect to resist those promoting racist divisions and hatred. [A Guidance note on countering far right political parties, extremist groups and racist politics, from the Church of England – see \[Guidance Note on Countering Far-Right Political Parties, Extremist Groups and Racist Politics\]\(#\)](#)

## Useful Information and Resources

### Churches Information

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland have prepared material to help churches and Christians in general to prepare for a General Election, when it is called. It is at [www.churcheselection.org.uk](http://www.churcheselection.org.uk) Here you can find: [Faith in Politics](#), a 16-page guide to some of the key policy areas likely to be debated in the run up to polling day. [Planning a hustings meeting](#) is CTBI's advice to local church based groups who are thinking about organising a community hustings. This builds on the experience of Churches Together groups planning and running events like this at General Elections for more than 30 years. Hustings meetings do **not** need to invite all the candidates – see below.

The themed papers are on the following:

Children and Young People; Criminal Justice; Democracy and Accountability; The Economy; Education; Environment; Equality and Diversity; Europe; Faith in Public Life; Global Peace and Security; Health; International Development; Migration and Sanctuary; Poverty and Social Exclusion

The Methodist Church website has a section on [Countering Political Extremism](#). The Church of England have recently published a [Guidance Note on Countering Far-Right Political Parties, Extremist Groups and Racist Politics](#). The Electoral Commission advises hustings organisers who are organising an event open to the public or who are thinking about not inviting all the candidates to contact them as soon as possible to make sure that the proper rules are followed. [Contact information is available here.](#)

The Evangelical Alliance also have a useful website at <http://www.eauk.org/public-affairs/elections/index.cfm>

Practical resources including organising an election forum.  
[www.makethecrosscount.com](http://www.makethecrosscount.com)

### Political websites:

Searchlight is an anti-fascist organisation – they want to make sure that people know the full story about who the BNP are and what they really stand for.

The [HOPE not hate website](#) aims to do just that, serving the anti-fascist movement and providing up to date news, good practice and analysis

<http://www.christiansinpolitics.co.uk/>

<http://www.conservatives.com/>

<http://www.labour.org.uk/>

<http://www.libdems.org.uk/>

<http://www.obv.org.uk/> (Operation Black Vote)

### Other:

[www.everyvotecounts.org.uk](http://www.everyvotecounts.org.uk) is a project designed to help people who have a learning disability get easy information about politics, how politics affects people and how to get involved and have a say in how the country is run. The website is also supplemented by printed materials for people who have difficulty using computers.

The Commission for Equality and Human Rights Commission have published a document called 'Defeating Organised Racial Hatred'. It provides myth busting briefings and helpful information. Details and a download are at:  
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/Pages/search.aspx?k=defeating%20organised%20hatred>

BBC Politics homepage with links to election information and current stories  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/default.stm)

The Guardian Website – specific section dedicated to the BNP and the Far Right. This includes interactive maps and all the latest news and views.  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/bnp-far-right>

The BNP's Christian Council of Britain  
<http://www.ccob.co.uk/>

The BNP  
<http://bnp.org.uk/>

**Please let us know of other information, resources and websites so that this section can be updated:**

**Contact:** [info@crc-online.org.uk](mailto:info@crc-online.org.uk)