



## Who Says Voting Doesn't Make a Difference

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### Complacency Threatens Black's Rights in the United Kingdom

"Voting doesn't make a difference." If I had a pound every time someone uttered those negative words, I'd have enough money to build an all Black college such as Atlanta, Georgia's Morehouse or Spelman.

It occurred again a week or so ago during a radio discussion about the recent local election results. The interviewer inquired, "isn't it true that Black people don't vote because they believe it doesn't make a difference?" "Well," I responded, "thanks to Black and white communities not turning out to vote during the local elections the **British National Party (BNP)** - a Far Right race hate filled party - won eight seats taking their total across England to thirteen."

Back in the 1980's when the BNP won their first council seat the nation was outraged; parliament debated the issue, and Black and white communities collaborated to ensure that at the next election the BNP councillor Derek Beacon, would be duly defeated. This time commentators could only partially lament that, "although it was disappointing to see the BNP make such gains, the number of their councillors elected was still relatively insignificant."

But the relatively small number of BNP councillors belies a more sinister truth. During these elections the BNP put up more than 200 candidates across the country, and with each candidate came a plague of race-hatred, hell bent on infecting the area and causing fear amongst Black and minority ethnic communities and further divisions between Black and white people.

But what is most troubling about the recent election results is that the calamity that unfolded could have been avoided. The "voting doesn't make a difference" behaviour handed the racist, bigoted, hate-filled BNP a democratic mandate on a silver platter.

More than half the BNP candidates who won last week did so with less than 40 votes. In Burnley, Maureen Stowe won by three votes, in Briercliff, Patricia Shirley Thompson won by fifteen votes, and in the Great Bridge ward of Sandwell won by 40 votes. Their success has emboldened BNP supporters and even the candidates that lost to argue that their cause is legitimate and gaining support. And what is their cause? Well, no different to what it was twenty years ago: for an all white UK, which they believe, can be achieved through voluntary deportation of Black, minority and ethnic communities. For the moment they have dropped their policy of forced deportation, not because they don't desire it but rather because they want to appear to be reasonable.

In the last two years the BNP's race card has been to jump on the immigration and asylum hysteria bandwagon. A bandwagon fuelled by the *Daily Mail*, the *Express* and the *Sun* that has feed the public with blatant lies and half truths that demonise Black people from war torn countries of Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq in the most horrific way. The *Sun*, for example, ran one headline claiming that asylum seekers were bringing in AIDS, TB, cholera and other deadly diseases. All the BNP needed to say thereafter is that "we'll be the party that will get rid of them."

To highlight the ground gained by the BNP a recent nationwide poll highlighted that 60 percent of those questioned agreed with the BNP's plan to tackle immigration. For their shameful part in this sorry saga, cowardly mainstream politicians have not only failed to face down the bigoted press and BNP, but have actually pandered to them. The Home Secretary's remark that "children of asylum seeking families are swamping our schools," and Ian Duncan Smith's proposal to lock up all those seeking asylum clearly aided the Far Right's success.

The rising support for the Far Right did not happen overnight. The implicit support from sections of the press and some

politicians has helped the BNP sow the seeds of hatred that are now being reaped at the ballot box. As far back as 2000, in the long run up to the 2001 General Elections, the BNP were aware that the tide was changing in their favour. Their leader Nick Griffin could not believe the racist language some desperate Conservative politicians were using during the campaign. "We would never dare use that language," commented Griffin, when a Tory Member of Parliament spoke about "too many foreigners and a mongrel race" but "its great," he added, "it legitimises us."

Having been brought in from the political cold by shabby tabloids and cowardly politicians, Nick Griffin and his supporters, now feel brazen enough to use the race hate language that was once reserved for private discussion.

The rise of the BNP in last week's local elections must serve as a wake up call for Britain's Black communities. Don't tell me that voting doesn't make a difference. As racism and bigotry find their way in mainstream politics we as a community simply don't have the luxury to put our heads in the political sand. If we do, we hand over control of our lives to politicians, who at best don't understand us and at worse don't like us.

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