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Singer's 'keep out BNP' message

"Kick them out and keep them out!"

That was the message from anti-fascist campaigners including singer Billy Bragg as they urged voters to reject the British National Party in Bradford.

Billy, famous for his protest songs against the far right, was in the city yesterday on a nationwide road show to galvanise voters throughout Britain to reject the BNP in next week's local elections.

Bradford was the third stop on a ten-date concert tour organised by unions Amicus, GMB, Unison, RMT and anti-fascist groups Searchlight, Unite against Fascism and Love Music Hate Racism.

Billy said: "The campaign is about telling people they should not be complacent.

"Where I come from in Barking we have a BNP councillor. One morning we woke up and 52 per cent of the people in a Labour ward had voted for the BNP. That was a bit of a shock.

"We are encouraging people to spend these last few days before the election to work with the anti-fascist groups to make sure people vote against the BNP because they rely on low turn-outs to win seats. Where there is a high turn-out they tend not to prosper."

The roadshow is targeting towns and cities where the BNP is strongest.

"That's why we are playing places like Bradford," said Billy. That's where the front-line is in the fight against fascism.

"The real challenge is not just to beat the BNP but also to start to articulate the frustration and desperation people are feeling on those estates voting for the BNP. They are people who have given up hope in the three main parties. Unfortunately the protest vote against them is a cry of anguish and frustration."

The BNP is fielding 16 candidates in the district. They will try to hold three seats and net more.

BNP whistle-blower Andy Sykes, who lifted the lid of activities of the Bradford BNP in an undercover television investigation, joined campaigners yesterday in Centenary Square.

Mr Sykes, 37, of Eccleshill, said: "Use that vote. We may not be happy with the main parties' politics but we need to choose one to keep racism out of Bradford."

Lorraine Nash, anti-fascist organiser for Bradford TUC, said: "Bradford has always been known for being a strong community. The BNP exploits Islamophobia in a big way. Bradford is not without problems about how communities get on but to label one group or one religion as the cause is nonsense."

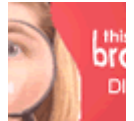
Earlier this week, Shipley Tory MP Philip Davies claimed voters are drifting to the BNP because of mainstream parties' failure to reflect concerns over immigration and race relations.

But Labour MP for Bradford North Terry Rooney said the far-right party will certainly lose one and possibly two of its three seats on Bradford Council.

Billy Bragg was to join comedian Phill Jupitus today in Bradford to broadcast a radio show from Ramair the University of Bradford's student radio station.

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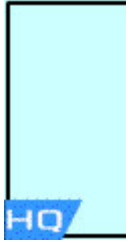
BBC digital station 6Music broadcast its breakfast show in which Phill Jupitus played host to local band Fourteen Corners.

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By Fiona Evans

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