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Bragg: Labour to blame for rise of BNP



Singer and anti-fascism campaigner Billy Bragg has warned Labour that by failing to focus on the working classes it is creating political space for the BNP.

In an interview with ePolitix.com, Bragg said he thought that ordinary working people were no longer being represented by Labour.

Ministers and the party should now "look away from middle England" and go back to their traditional roots, he argued.

Bragg stressed that unless Labour recognises the "phenomena of the working poor", voters will continue to look to the BNP as the "nuclear button" to press when they want to register a protest.

Campaign

The singer is currently undertaking a UK-wide tour, supported by a coalition of trade unions and anti-fascist groups, under the 'Hope not Hate' banner.

He is attempting to raise awareness and stop the BNP gaining council seats in areas across the country.

Recent polls have suggested the BNP could see its support rise in next week's local elections, and employment minister Margaret Hodge has warned that voters in her Barking constituency are turning to the far-right.

But Bragg, whose home town is Barking, said problems in the area were "not about race, what is happening in Barking is about resources".

He added that "if you want to really annoy the local Labour council and get them to sort shit out then the nuclear button to press would be to vote in a BNP council".

London councils

Pointing to a range of economic and social problems in Barking, as well as exclusion from the political process, he said voters in the area are "very frustrated".

"Barking is no more racist and no less multicultural than any other London borough," Bragg told ePolitix.com

But he said that demographic changes had left the BNP thinking that they can make progress in the area.

Bragg warned that "if they can get a toe hold there then there is a whole arc from Walthamstow in the north down to Streatham where they think they might be able to edge their way in".

"So it is crucial that we defeat them in Barking."

He also took a swipe at Hodge's role in local politics and her failure to address the concerns of local voters.

"When Margaret Hodge became the MP, they thought that they would have a representative who had Blair's ear and their loyalty would continue to be rewarded but unfortunately it hasn't been," Bragg said.

"The people of Barking have been very, very frustrated and they are striking out in a very negative way.

"The Labour Party and the policies of the Labour government bear considerable responsibility for that.

"I don't think voting for the BNP is going to help the ordinary working people of Barking at all but I would argue that this is about resources and not race."

Unions

Bragg also said their involvement in the campaign shows there is a role for trade unions outside of the workplace.

"They are not just about their members but about their members' families and the communities where their members live and work, and I think that is a more important issue for the unions than perhaps for the mainstream political parties," he said.

"It was the unions which got us the minimum wage, it was the unions which got us the weekend and it was the unions which founded the Labour Party."

But speaking at the first event of Bragg's tour in Wolverhampton, local Labour MP and government whip Tom Watson told ePolitix.com: "I think you could try and blame Tony Blair for a number of things but the rise of fascism isn't one of them."

"The challenge for local Labour parties is to spread the message of the positive work Labour is doing throughout the community," he added.