

EXTREMIST PARTIES AND THE LOCALISM BILL

What is the Localism Bill?

The Localism Bill was presented to Parliament on 13 December 2010 and working its way through parliament for enactment in the Summer of 2011. The Coalition Government considers the Bill to be the key instrument for introducing the infrastructure needed for delivering the Big Society. The Bill abolishes layers of scrutiny and bureaucracy, devolving key responsibilities, resources, and procedures to local communities and their representatives.¹ It also lifts many of the regulations that structure local government accountability and the

Post 2010 Elections

The BNP's failure to make their anticipated breakthrough in the General and Local Elections in 2010 can be attributed to a variety of causes including the intervention of coalitions in which the churches have participated, as well as the party's propensity to infighting very publically.² The strength of the party in local branches may not be as diminished as the chaotic centre of the party – this may be more apparent after the 2011 Local Elections.

Localism as opportunity

Changes in the structure of local politics through the 'Localism' legislation may mean that the BNP is able to rebuild in areas where it has succeeded in the past despite problems at centre. In 2009 Stuart Wilks-Heeg warned that the party could be 'one local crisis from controlling a council.'³ The lifting of many controls and checks from local government may mean that crisis and failure are more likely in the future. Localism legislation seems more suited to West London Boroughs than the authorities of post industrial areas. The BNP has proved itself opportunist in such situations in the past.

The driving of decision making past local authorities to neighbourhood groups and parish councils may mean that communities need to wary of the advantage that may be taken at levels of governance which have not traditionally attracted large fields of candidates or where access to power is no longer through the costly burden of electoral politics. Localism allows small groups of unelected residents a disproportionate say in a community's affairs so long as they can prove a local connection. The BNP has already identified this as a potential area of activity: 'The

¹ *Localism Bill*

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmbills/126/11126.i-v.html>

Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: an essential guide

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/decentralisationguide>

A plain English guide to the Localism Bill

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localismplainenglishguide>

² Nick Lowles, 'Routed' *Searchlight* 420, June 2010.

³ Stuart Wilks-Heeg, 'The Canary in a Coalmine? Explaining the Emergence of the British National Party in English Local Politics', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 62.3 (2009), p. 397.

proposed Localism Bill is nothing but leftist social engineering but offers an unprecedented opportunity to impact upon society in favour of the indigenous population [...]⁴

Local broad based campaigning has proved effective when particular authorities have been targeted – the challenge will now be how we take this approach to a neighbourhood/sub-ward level. The churches may find themselves well placed to be part of the strategies that are needed.

⁴ ‘Localism Bill is Leftist Social Engineering but Offers Chance to Influence Society’ BNP website
<<http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/localism-bill-leftist-social-engineering-offers-chance-influence-society>>