

# Liberal media and the racist BNP

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2008/04/11/liberal-media-and-the-racist-bnp/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2008/04/11/liberal-media-and-the-racist-bnp/)

2008-4-11

I live too far down the hills of north London to claim the [Hampstead and Highgate Express](#) as my local paper although it is sold outside my tube station. But I know some of the staff and am fully aware of its reputation as just about the highest quality local paper in Britain. It serves a very rich area of the capital whose residents have traditionally been of a leftish, intellectual and Jewish nature. So it is no surprise that some of them are angered at the paper's decision to accept an election advertisement from the racist [British National party](#) who are contesting local elections.



I think that the H&H has done the right thing as journalists and as liberals. They stand [accused](#) by both readers and their own [staff](#) of giving succour to some very nasty people. One newspaper person told the Guardian:

*"The company is taking advertising money from the BNP for the Ham & High. It's wrong. We wouldn't freelance for the BNP so we don't want our wages as employees of the Ham & High and Archant paid by them."*

That's an odd argument. I wouldn't work for [Arsenal football club](#) but I understand why my local paper takes advertising money from them. Anti-racist campaigners have argued that this evil group should not be given a platform. One [blogger](#) has gone so far as to suggest that the Ham and High should not even quote the BNP in news stories.

I think this is counter-productive and wrong in principle. As a journalist I believe that you should report reality and not hide from it. As a liberal I am convinced that the best way to counter illiberal views is to treat them on the same terms as you would other political ideologies.

In a practical sense I think it only gives the BNP a propaganda victory if you censor them in any way. I don't believe in total free speech. If a newspaper doesn't want to run a BNP advert – or anyone else's – than that is a question of policy. But for a liberal newspaper not to run the advert and then to claim that it is open and pluralistic would be to show a lack of confidence in the strength of its values.

Labour councillor Theo Blackwell disagrees:

*"The editor seems to be really waving a flag over this. He seems to have done this very intentionally as a marker of freedom of speech. Anyone who knows basic civics would say this is more than just giving a platform to the BNP – it's gone above and beyond that."*

I would suggest that just shows how Labour has failed to convince the people of London. The BNP only gains votes if the electorate thinks it is not providing the housing, jobs and community relations that would make the BNP redundant. This is ultimately about politics not the media.

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science