

We'll pack you off to South Pole: BNP leader told on BBC show

The leader of the anti-immigrant British National Party (BNP) was booed, jeered and scorned by the studio audience of a popular television show after weeks of protests against his appearance erupted Thursday in a large demonstration and six arrests.

As Nick Griffin made his debut on the flagship BBC panel discussion show Question Time, an Asian member of the audience told him that far from expelling non-Whites from Britain, it is the BNP leader who could be put on a flight out.

'You'd be surprised how many people would have a whip-round to buy you a ticket - and your supporters - to go to the South Pole. It's a colourless landscape that will suit you fine,' he told the far-right politician to applause from other members of the audience.

Griffin had to be sneaked in and out of the BBC's west London studios after up to 1,000 anti-racist protesters laid siege to the main entrance, with a handful storming the reception area before being dragged out by security.

The television centre was 'locked down' during an operation in which three police officers and three demonstrators were injured.

The BBC's decision to host Griffin, who has denied the Nazi holocaust ever happened, outraged holocaust survivors, anti-fascist groups, trade unions and senior government minister Peter Hain, a veteran of the South African anti-Apartheid movement.

Hain, who campaigned to block the broadcast, said after the show: 'This decision could end up blighting the lives of many decent people just because they are not white. The BBC should be ashamed of single-handedly doing a racist, fascist party the biggest favour in its grubby history.'

Doris Page, 73, a retired health worker who fled Nazi Germany in 1939, said at the protest: 'My family was killed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. The BBC has not learned from history. Hitler grew from a very small start.'

The MP for the local Shepherd's Bush area said his constituents were worried about Griffin's appearance in a multi-ethnic part of London, and former Mayor Ken Livingstone warned the BBC would 'bear moral responsibility' if the broadcast resulted in a surge in violence against Black and Asian people.

The BBC defended its decision saying it was obliged to call Griffin once his party had won two European Parliament seats in elections this June.

'It would have been quite wrong for the BBC to have said, 'yes you are allowed to stand in elections, yes you've got a level of support that now meets the threshold but the BBC doesn't think that you should be on', said BBC deputy director-general Mark Byford.

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