



The Threat of UKIP

Discussion and Analysis



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Fallout from 2012 local elections

UKIP's success in the local elections exceeded even generous predictions; gaining 137 additional seats has cemented their transformation from a fringe party to a threat to established parties. 'Farage-mania' has been growing since the Eastleigh by-election, where UKIP were 1771 votes shy of a parliamentary seat. All three major parties have since adopted a more vocal stance on immigration in response to the UKIP surge. Over-emphasis on immigration arguably cost Michael Howard and the Conservatives the 2005 General Election but UKIP have successfully exploited the shift in public opinion on the subject. They have been able to channel public concerns and reservations about the EU and unregulated net migration. This is evident by UKIP's major success in Boston, Lincolnshire; an area significantly affected by immigration. They have successfully come across as a viable alternative, utilising both their status as Westminster outsiders and noticeable anti immigration rhetoric.

Worries in Westminster

Everyone in Westminster is talking about UKIP. The purple surge that we saw in last week's county council elections has got political anoraks talking. The Prime Minister needs to secure his core supporters with more of a focus on immigration, crime and the EU, say some. Others urge Cameron not to ape Farage as he won't be able to out-kip a kipper. They'll just come back to the table asking for more.

I personally don't think there is a one-size-fits-all strategy for dealing with the UKIP problem. And here's why.

General Elections in the UK are won and lost in only a handful of seats. This week, I asked my brother-in-law, a data-set wizard, to pull together some figures showing the core marginal seats that will be up for grabs in 2015. There are 108 of these marginal constituencies where the majority is less than 6%. UKIP will have a major say in at least 53 of these based on its share of the vote in 2010 (i.e. the party's vote share is larger than the majority in that marginal).

Seat	Region	Incumbent	Con10	Lab10	LD10	UKIP10	Maj10
Thurrock	East of England	Conservative	36.8	36.6	10.7	7.4	0.2
Plymouth Sutton and Devon	South West	Conservative	34.3	31.7	24.7	6.5	2.6
Halesowen and Rowley Regis	West Midlands	Conservative	41.2	36.6	14.8	6.4	4.6
Newton Abbot	South West	Conservative	43.0	7.0	41.9	6.4	1.1
Devon West and Torridge	South West	Conservative	45.7	5.3	40.3	5.5	5.3
Waveney	East of England	Conservative	40.2	38.7	13.3	5.3	1.5
Camborne and Redruth	South West	Conservative	37.6	16.3	37.4	5.1	0.2
Morecambe and Lunesdale	North West	Conservative	41.4	39.4	13.7	4.2	2.0
Truro and Falmouth	South West	Conservative	41.7	9.6	40.8	3.9	0.9
Wolverhampton South West	West Midlands	Conservative	40.7	39.0	16.0	3.7	1.7
Brighton Kemptown	South East	Conservative	38.0	34.9	18.0	3.2	3.1
Sherwood	Yorkshire	Conservative	39.2	38.8	14.9	3.0	0.4
Warrington South	North West	Conservative	35.8	33.0	27.5	3.0	2.8
Stockton South	North East	Conservative	38.9	38.3	15.1	2.9	0.7
Warwickshire North	West Midlands	Conservative	40.2	40.1	11.6	2.8	0.1
Oxford West and Abingdon	South East	Conservative	42.3	10.6	42.0	2.7	0.3
Lancaster and Fleetwood	North West	Conservative	36.1	35.3	19.1	2.4	0.8
Cardiff North	Wales	Conservative	37.5	37.1	18.3	2.4	0.4
Weaver Vale	North West	Conservative	38.5	36.3	18.6	2.3	2.3
Carlisle	North West	Conservative	39.3	37.3	15.6	2.3	2.0
Broxtowe	East Midlands	Conservative	39.0	38.3	16.9	2.3	0.7
Stroud	South West	Conservative	40.8	38.6	15.5	2.2	2.2
Hendon	London	Conservative	42.3	42.1	12.4	2.1	0.2
Amber Valley	East Midlands	Conservative	38.6	37.5	14.4	2.0	1.2

The Conservative party is incumbent in 24 of these seats, all but five of which are Tory-Labour battlegrounds. There is no doubt that MPs such as Jackie Doyle-Price in Thurrock, Eric Ollerenshaw in Lancaster and Fleetwood and David Mowat in Warrington South have a fight on their hands come 2015. They are under threat from UKIP eating into their very small majorities. However, they have to be conscious of another, arguably more dangerous problem - Labour eating into the Lib Dem vote as disillusioned progressives decide to back Miliband. Lord Ashcroft's polling earlier in the year found that two fifths of Lib Dem voters from 2010 have switched to Labour or the Greens. And of all defectors from the Libs, those switching to Labour are the most likely to say they are sure how they will vote.

If, as a result of making overtures to UKIP, the Lib Dem vote breaks disproportionately for Labour, then holding onto seats in the North West and Midlands will be especially difficult for the Conservative incumbents.

However, a different approach might be required in other regions of the country. In the four Lib Dem battlegrounds down in the South West, for example, the local Conservative associations probably need to hold the vote and entice transient Kippers back into the Tory fold.

Perhaps a more robust right-wing strategy is called for in the South West?

Seat	Region	Incumbent	Con10	Lab10	LD10	UKIP10	Maj10
Dudley North	West Midlands	Labour	37.0	38.7	10.5	8.5	1.7
Walsall South	West Midlands	Labour	35.4	39.7	14.4	8.4	4.3
Newcastle-under-Lyme	North East	Labour	34.4	38.0	19.6	8.1	3.6
Plymouth Moor View	South West	Labour	33.3	37.2	16.9	7.7	3.8
Great Grimsby	Yorkshire	Labour	30.5	32.7	22.4	6.2	2.2
Telford	West Midlands	Labour	36.3	38.7	15.5	5.9	2.4
Derbyshire North East	East Midlands	Labour	33.0	38.2	23.3	5.6	5.2
Walsall North	West Midlands	Labour	34.3	37.0	13.1	4.8	2.7
Rochdale	North West	Labour	18.1	36.4	34.4	4.4	1.9
Southampton Itchen	South East	Labour	36.3	36.8	20.8	4.3	0.4
Hull North	Yorkshire	Labour	13.1	39.2	37.3	4.1	1.9
Middlesbrough South and East	North East	Labour	35.6	39.3	15.9	4.1	3.6
Bolton West	North West	Labour	38.3	38.5	17.2	4.0	0.2
Oldham East and Saddleworth	North West	Labour	26.4	31.9	31.6	3.9	0.2
Wirral South	North West	Labour	39.5	40.8	16.6	3.2	1.3
Chesterfield	East Midlands	Labour	15.7	39.0	37.8	3.1	1.2
Morley and Outwood	Yorkshire	Labour	35.3	37.6	16.8	3.1	2.3
Swansea West	Wales	Labour	20.8	34.7	33.2	2.0	1.4
Ashfield	East Midlands	Labour	22.2	33.7	33.3	1.9	0.4
Derby North	East Midlands	Labour	31.7	33.0	28.0	1.8	1.4
Sheffield Central	Yorkshire	Labour	10.1	41.3	40.9	1.6	0.4
Hampstead and Kilburn	London	Labour	32.7	32.8	31.2	0.8	0.1

As with the retention seats, the critical issue in the 15 constituencies the Conservatives have to take from Labour to stand a chance of winning an overall majority at the next election, is how the Lib Dem vote will break for the Conservatives and Labour.

Tacking right probably won't satisfy the 8.5% of voters who voted UKIP in Dudley North. And it will have the added effect of possibly pushing Lib Dem voters into the arms of Ed Miliband and Labour. However, any defections to UKIP will kill the chances of Tory gains in the Midlands and North West. This is an unenviable Catch-22 for the party machine.

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for dealing with the UKIP problem. Party strategists have to ask themselves what is the biggest risk: Conservatives defecting to UKIP, or former Lib Dems breaking disproportionately for Labour?

For what it's worth, my advice to David Cameron would be to forget about the various electoral connotations and focus on leading the country.

Elections are increasingly decided on competency as Policy Exchange's report, Northern Lights, found last year. As every good business leader understands, you need to be aware of what the competition is up to and be prepared to second guess their next steps. But a good leader also sticks to what they think is the right course of action, even if others - including friends - disagree.

This article originally appeared on ConservativeHome.

Opinion

John Mann - the Labour MP for Bassetlaw's view

UKIP is a bigger problem for the Conservatives than Labour, but only if Labour moves fast to address voters concerns.

My evidence for this is the detailed analysis that we are able to carry out on Bassetlaw results, which can compare over a 10 year period.

We cannot be certain how any single individual votes, but we can reach an accuracy of over 90% by voter surveying (knocking up in Labour parlance), use of the marked register and sampling each individual areas.

This we have done in detail in Bassetlaw since 2008, but with most data going back to 2003.

We will need the marked register for these elections to fine tune our analysis, but it is already very clear what happened.

1. Core Tory voters switched to UKIP. This is very important, because it creates a huge headache for the Tories. These people always vote and never vote Labour or Liberal. There is nothing worse than having to fight for your core vote.
2. The Labour core vote stayed Labour, with virtually no exceptions.
3. Lost 97 Labour voters voted UKIP, but many didn't get round to actually voting.
4. Public sector lost 97 Labour voters, are beginning to return to Labour.

5. Floating voters and lost Labour voters to UKIP have voted non Labour before (BNP/Liberal/Tory/independent).

6. There are a few split Labour households, man UKIP, woman Labour, but not many.

7. There are neighbour clusters of UKIP voters - one neighbour persuading the others.

8. Areas with a popular local pub are more likely to vote UKIP.

Most of this is not a surprise. I briefed a BBC policy analyst that UKIP would win over 100 seats two weeks ago and predicted their local result to within a few votes.

Crucially the UKIP vote is not being determined as much by extended family discussion as by friends, neighbours and workmate discussions. UKIP's appeal stands outside the family, making them vulnerable on all family issues. Therefore strong incumbency pull will protect disproportionately against UKIP.

Trade unionists or those who should be in unions - working class private sector employees are the biggest UKIP threat to Labour, by a significant degree. These are the people we lost to UKIP.

UKIP will need tackling in different ways in different parts of the country. In the industrial North, the unions should have billboards with Farage holding his Thatcher mug, quoting his support for Thatcher's de-industrialisation. Crude but effective. It is time he was taken head on. (Come on BBC or Sky put me on head to head with him)

However, we will fundamentally fail if we do not see that the UKIP appeal is well beyond UKIP. For every Labour vote lost to UKIP, there are many more lost 97 voters refusing to turn out. The issues are the same. We can expose UKIP on their love of bankers, hatred of the NHS and general Thatcherism, but this does not bring back the lost voters.

Let me pose three questions therefore.

1. How is it fair that a youth can be born in a council house, live in it for 18 years and then lose out in allocation to a Polish family who have been in the country for a few months. How is this social justice?

2. Why is it fair that a 58 year old man, disabled from coal mining loses his incapacity benefit, but a family new to the country gets full housing benefit?

3. Why should an employer be able to employ from a Polish agency and refuse to interview a 24 year old local person seeking work?

The problem we face is not the EU Common Market. The highest per capita Eastern European immigration into Europe is into Norway, outside the EU.

Nigel Farage with his German banker wife and his salary paid in Euros is a beneficiary of the free movement of Labour. Many of my constituents are the losers.

The Labour Common Market Safeguards Committee morphed into some vague anti EU body. Today it has been re-created; it's aim - an end to the Common Market.

It is not socially sustainable to allow flexible labour markets, free movement of Labour and capital and have social justice. Why do people think that Google and Facebook base themselves in Ireland and Amazon in Luxembourg?

It is time to stop meddling with vague concepts. Let us have clear social justice priorities

The top priority in housing for those who have lived in social housing as children.

No benefits for anyone until they have paid National insurance for two years.

No free flow of capital to avoid taxes.

No zero hour's agency contracts with no employment rights.

No open market in labour in the United Kingdom, rather a system of work permits, including for all Europeans.

Ed Miliband needs to commit Labour to a people's Europe, by announcing that he will tear up the single market in labour and

capital. I think we will find that Germany, France, Holland and Denmark will quickly follow our lead.

A control over the Common Market, free flow of people but not free flow of labour and capital. That's what I call a real renegotiation.

Are there fundamental problems with the European Union?

Analysis

Not only the right and UKIP have issues with Europe. The continuing on and off Euro crisis has had a negative effect with left of centre thinking. The most important point to emerge from the crisis is that Europe's political reinvention will depend exclusively on the social struggle against neoliberal politics. Neoliberalism, the absurd idea of economic government based solely on the market and its ability to self-regulate, is at the root of the great illusion of a leaderless Europe supposedly unified by a euro that has controlled the internal economic and social differences according to the logic of the financial markets.

Yet, neoliberalism is still the only language used by European politicians to confront the crisis and to face the social conflicts that will break out over the next few months. There exists no European government; only management of austerity measures and of repression.

The European banking stress tests were of little use - they only breathed a bit of life back into the German and French banks that had been exposed to the sovereign debt of the outlying countries of the EU. The recent economic successes of Germany - the increase in exports, in particular to areas outside the Eurozone - cannot reverse the direction of the euro's crisis.

In fact, the cracks between the economically strong countries and those that are industrially weak, conditioned by the politics of the European Central Bank, can only get worse. In all likelihood, the final outcome of this crisis will be the exit of Germany from the euro - it's just a matter of time.

Greece or Spain's departure from the Eurozone would not heal the cracks inside the central block of the EU or the divide between Germany - who are focusing more on Asian and South American markets and France, which has been losing economic power and political credibility for some time.

In this context, the austerity measures imposed on all Eurozone countries will be impossible to carry out. There will be a stampede away from the plan of European stability and very soon, as Hungary has shown us, repercussions on economic and social policy within the member states. We are watching the de-Europeanisation of Europe.

If this is the result of making capitalism more and more focused on finance over the last few decades, then it is from this crisis that we must find a way out of neoliberalism, which is its main cause. The solution is not, at least for the moment, in writing a new European constitution. It is in starting up constitutional processes from the ground up, movements to fight against the austerity measures that are still, in the most part, to be implemented.

We must resist the reduction of salaries, oppose cuts in public services, redistribute the wealth that financial capitalism has appropriated and convert economic growth into sustainable development. The Europe, characterised by its people and its differences, will only be saved if neoliberal Europe is destroyed.

That's where UKIP's support comes from; the virulent disenchantment and irreverence with and toward official politics. It is a knee-jerk reaction - in both senses - against the cultural trajectory toward greater integration and acceptance of minority communities at the perceived expense of the majority. It must be concluded that this is directly due to the unforeseen consequence of the way our social fabric has been bent and ripped by 30 years of neoliberal economics. All you need do is look at all the liberal democracies who've undergone similar social change over that time frame. Most continental countries have seen the emergence of right-populist parties that position themselves as ostensible truth-tellers to a corrupt, uncaring and elitist political class; UKIP are travellers on this well-trodden path.

Threat to the Tories?

Nigel Farage the leader of UKIP has the Tories in his sights.

Nigel Farage Speaking earlier in the year;

Ever since UKIP was founded, some have viewed it as an organisation for disgruntled Conservatives, in particular Home Counties Tories, who vote for UKIP at European elections to send a message to the Tory Party hierarchy.

I'm sure there are some who do only vote for us at European elections, understanding that the 'first past the post' system used for Westminster elections makes breaking through very difficult. So, even though public opinion is increasingly on our side, there are still those who say we're 'splitting the vote' or 'letting the federalists in'.

But which vote would UKIP be splitting? The pro-EU social democrat vote or that of the social democrats who insist the UK must stay in the EU?

If anyone poses a threat to the Conservatives, it's David Cameron. His views are different from traditional grassroots Tories and after less than two years in power, he's responsible for a growing list of broken promises.

There was the promise to overturn the hunting ban; the pledge to reform the US-UK extradition treaty; the faux outrage at the Human Rights Act and his three-line-whip to deny the British people a referendum. The latter was brought about through a public petition of over 100,000 signatures, yet Cameron was unmoved. Ignore that moment of Eurosceptic posturing in December. It's party policy not only to deny the British people a referendum, but also to refuse to even contemplate that Britain's place is in the global economy, outside the constraints of the EU.

It's not the coalition that has led to this state of affairs, although the Liberal Democrats are a convenient whipping boy for those wishing to hide the true beliefs of the upper echelons of the Conservative Party. Tory manifesto pledges and commitments made during the campaign

were just calculated moves to lure in an electorate desperate for an alternative to Labour.

Far from being a threat to the Conservative Party, UKIP is a threat to the entire political class. The party is the fastest-growing in Britain today, with people joining us from across the political spectrum.

That growth is evident in national opinion polls, in election results and in new membership figures. UKIP had its best results outside of the European elections in Barnsley, beating everyone bar Labour in one of their strongholds. Bradford West was another opportunity for the party to show that its policies are relevant, that it's standing up and saying things people have been wanting their politicians to say for years. For those who still believe UKIP only draws support from disenfranchised Tories, it may have been a revelation that our Bradford West candidate was a former Green Party member.

Had it not been for the 'veto that never was', UKIP would have beaten the Lib Dems in the Feltham and Heston by-election. As it was, we were only narrowly beaten to third place in a constituency where we had no track record.

UKIP is putting forward ideas for the kind of Britain we want to live in. It's a Britain where we govern ourselves, where we trade with the world. A country where people aren't allowed just to take from the welfare system, where the armed forces aren't made to police the world while politicians cut their numbers and equipment and where local decisions can be made by local people.

We're reaching a turning point in UK politics; people realise that tough decisions need to be made on its economy and its best interests.

The old parties are running out of excuses for failure and voters are starting to look to UKIP for the solutions.

How realistic is the threat?

It is clear from the rant above that Mr Farage and UKIP think they can attract the disgruntled from all sides of the political spectrum. However it appears that UKIP are currently stirring things up with the

Tories over Europe. This has, since the days of Thatcher, been a bit of an Achilles heel for them. Having a leader that backed single sex marriage in the face of the blue rinses who run the Conservative Constituency Associations, when UKIP took the traditional line, can only have increased the threat to the Tories whose core vote no longer feels it shameful to admit to transferring their support to UKIP. They are shamelessly politically incorrect rogues, which traditional Tories rather like, since they are no afraid to wind up the opposition and take the flak. Godfrey Bloom may well be an embarrassment to his leader but he may turn out to be quite a political asset to UKIP - he has a devil-may-care fearlessness that is a rare and admirable characteristic in a politician.

Grassroots threat to the Tories

Out in the Tory shires, many grassroots Tories are angry with the lack of progress towards their brand of conservatism.

This is a typical grass roots opinion.

“It didn’t stop us from losing masses of seats. We must and I would beg every tory to go back to their main principles. The people are crying out to leave the EU and for immigration to be controlled they are bringing us to our knees. People have turned to UKIP because we are not willing to deal with the issues; a 2017 referendum where our Prime Minister David Cameron will not campaign for an out vote is not even close to good enough.” (A disillusioned Tory)

Does Labour have its own potential version of UKIP?

Could Left Unity become Labour's UKIP?

Recently this view was aired in the New Statesman.

Undominated by a central charismatic figure and uncontrolled by a single far-left group, Left Unity is a movement that is being built from the bottom up.

"There is a spectre haunting Britain," Ken Loach warned a packed conference hall at the first national meeting of a political movement in its genesis. "It's called Nigel Farage."

There will be few more haunted by the spectre of Farage's UKIP than David Cameron as he heads into conference season. With the European Parliament elections looming - traditional high ground for UKIP - the Prime Minister will not be able to ignore a boisterous Tory right; both nervous and emboldened by Farage's forward march and all the more dangerous for it.

Ed Miliband, by comparison, has had a relatively easy ride from the Labour left; comfortable in the assumption that there is no alternative. Miliband matches Conservative spending plans and where is the left? He refuses to pledge to repeal the bedroom tax and where is the left? He turns his back on the trade unionists who supported his leadership bid and where is the left?

Unfortunately for the working class people most devastated by the cuts and for democracy as a whole, we now have three main parties fully signed up to an austerity agenda, while UKIP's rise tugs the national debate even further to the right.

The left, divided and weak, has not yet been able to change the course of that debate, to make the case that it was not welfare spending that wrecked the economy but a crisis of unfettered capitalism. However, things are beginning to change. In response to an appeal by Loach, almost 10,000 people have signed up to the Left Unity campaign to form a new party of the left, with around 100 local groups springing up organically across the country.

While for many this is not their first shot at uniting a fractured left and the painful experiences of the Socialist Alliance and George Galloway's Respect are still fresh in their mind; there is a sense that there is something different about Left Unity. Undominated by a central charismatic figure and uncontrolled by a single Trot group such as the SWP, Left Unity is a movement that is genuinely being built from the bottom up by local activists sick of austerity and fearful for the future of the NHS.

As Left Unity moves towards its founding conference at London's Royal National Hotel on 30 November, the task of harmonising such a large choir of angry voices will not be easy.

At the beginning of this year, when Cameron was attempting to see off the UKIP threat and blindside Labour by promising a referendum on Britain's EU membership, Miliband tacked to the left with a 10p tax rate funded by a mansion tax. The result of failed austerity and Labour offering the glimmer of an alternative was an 11-point poll lead for Miliband's party. Since Labour's capitulation to the Tory agenda and a summer of silence, that poll lead has narrowed.

The space is there to the left; the votes are there and if Labour will not fill it, then Left Unity could.

Under first-past-the-post, parties to the left of Labour face an uphill struggle to gain electoral representation. But if Left Unity achieves what Loach and 10,000 others hope it will - struggling every day among the communities most affected by the cuts, defending public services, making a difference to the lives of the most vulnerable people in society and making the case for a more equal society - then it will make Labour fight hard for every single working class vote.

Labour may soon face the threat of its own UKIP; if the left can just hold it together, then it will no longer go ignored.

Salman Shaheen

(Times of India, New Statesman, New Internationalist, Liberal Conspiracy and Left Foot Forward)

Is there any truth in this view point? Possibly

The media seems convinced that UKIP is drawing support from the Tories alone. I think this is because they are underestimating the discontent and growing political awareness of the ordinary white population: the old working class.

I think UKIP will pick up the traditional Labour vote, in northern towns in particular, along with normally apathetic and demoralised older people who had given up on politics.

Labour won the South Shields by-election but the threat of UKIP loomed large over all three main political parties as the anti-Europe party took second place in the northeast constituency.

The strong showing of Nigel Farage's party will come as a bitter blow for David Cameron, who has lost of hundreds of councillors across 35 councils in England and Wales. The party was defending 1,452 seats in its shire heartlands, against 273 for Labour. Nearly 2,400 seats were contested.

The performance in South Shields will pile the pressure on the prime minister and will be deeply disappointing for Tories in marginal northern seats - Lancaster & Fleetwood, Morecambe and Lunesdale and Bury North - who are already feeling deeply gloomy after a recent poll suggested Labour's lead in the north had widened to about 25 points, against a 8-point lead overall.

Ms Lewell-Buck, said people in South Shields had sent David Cameron, the prime minister, a clear message.

"It's time to change course," she said. "It was my great, great, great, grandfather who invented the lifeboat. After tonight's results David Cameron is going to be in need of such a vessel." "Local people", she said, "wanted jobs and growth. South Shields has returned a Labour MP since 1935."

The Rawmarsh by election could be seen to back up this opinion. The previously safe Labour seat of Rawmarsh in Rotherham was won last night by UKIP. The dramatic collapse of the BNP vote was clearly a contributory factor but is only part of the story.

UKIP are able to tap into the same discontents and fears that once made the BNP a threat but without the overtly fascist baggage. This makes UKIP potentially far more dangerous as disenchanting voters are not faced with the same moral dilemmas associated with voting BNP.

Some commentators believe that UKIP is mainly a threat to the Tories, a thesis that remains largely untested as this year's elections were in the shires rather than the cities. However, we have seen time after time UKIP coming second in parliamentary by elections and now winning a council seat in Rotherham. This does suggest that UKIP are a bigger threat to Labour than some imagine.

Notwithstanding some local contention regarding the Labour candidate, this result should be a wake-up call for those who miss the threat posed by UKIP.

However, UKIP policies on areas such as welfare are more similar to Tory policies than Labour ones. They are for a low tax, pro-business anti welfare society. That makes them much more attractive to Tory than Labour voters. But they may pick up a few anti-immigration Labour voters, who may not always realise how they work against the poor and trade unions. Left Unity are, in my opinion, not going to jeopardise the position of the vast majority of left of centre opinion in the country and vote for any minority grouping.

The threat of the return of a majority Tory government is too unpalatable to imagine; only the Trotskyite left want things to get worse, with their belief that despair will lead to insurrection. The credibility of this view is deeply flawed. There is a case for Labour to embrace policies that will benefit northern, former industrial towns that are suffering from the imposition of the government's austerity programme.

Is the press a threat?

UKIP have found allies in the press, a number of right wing commentators including Melanie Phillips and James Delingpole have already expressed sympathy for UKIP. The ideas of opposition to Europe and tougher immigration controls have often found support in right and centre-right publications. Rather unnoticed, UKIP is the only party to oppose the Royal Charter for press regulation. A move which

combines UKIP's proclaimed support for individual freedom with a cunning realist political manoeuvre, as UKIP look to gain out of the apparent consensus of the political establishment with 'Hacked Off'. We can only expect further meetings between Nigel Farage and Rupert Murdoch; Farage's main effort will be to secure News International support for the European Elections (2014).

Murdoch's Euro-scepticism is well documented. An endorsement of UKIP for these elections will allow him to strike back at mainstream parties for the Royal Charter; reminding party leaders of his considerable influence in British politics, which they will arguably covet before the 2015 General Election. On top of this there is the obvious benefit to Farage, whose popular appeal can only be further enhanced by such an alliance.

However, though UKIP would benefit from an alliance with Murdoch, their success does not depend on it. They are widely tipped to come at least second in number of British seats in the European Parliament in which they are currently third.

Conclusions

Labour should be alarmed by UKIP's success; they can ill afford to treat UKIP as an exclusively Tory threat. Despite gaining 291 seats and retaining South Shields, UKIP's popularity is growing in safe Labour seats; coming second in the Rotherham by-election last year. More worrying was Labour's failure to break through in the South of England, which could prove damaging to Ed Miliband's 'One Nation Labour' project. UKIP, rather than Labour, were able to make larger gains. In West Sussex, UKIP gained 10 seats compared to Labour's 4.

Similarly, in Hampshire Labour managed a mere 3 gains while UKIP gained 10. Labour cannot merely rely on defections from disgruntled Lib Dems. The failure to make ground in the South is highly damaging for their prospect of an overall majority in the 2015 General Election.

An optimist would say, with some justification, that however well UKIP poll now, there is bound to be some migration back to the main parties come general election time.

Therefore, the best UKIP could possibly hope for is a vote in perhaps the low teens. In other words, a vote that could well result in a Labour majority or Liberal Democrat - Labour coalition this would almost certainly result in no European referendum. A position that is potentially menacing if there is no improvement in the economy or living standards, stoked up to fever pitch by the right wing press.

A pessimist would say that it is perfectly possible for UKIP to poll at much higher polling levels, particularly if the party has momentum after the European elections next year. If Ed Miliband and Labour do not establish clear and popular policies, it could mean that the Tories may well make up some ground against Labour, while still losing other votes to UKIP. If UKIP campaign on the issue of immigration and Labour do not tackle the issue head on, there is likely to be a swing to UKIP. Many Labour working class voters, especially in the north, will vote UKIP. The fear is that the Euro elections, seen by many voters as irrelevant, could contrive to deliver victory to UKIP.

Doing well in the in the local and euro elections will grant them access to power and resources at a national and local level and will enable them to build up a strong grassroots network. Through this, UKIP can reinforce and expand their existing support. Utilising their growing popularity from potential success in the Euro Elections, would give them a spring board to prepare for a fight in the General Election. UKIP are still capable of major personal and political blunders and may fade away as many predict but it's not wise to bank on it. There is still everything to play for and Labour is in a reasonable position. The emphasis on the high cost of living is popular at the moment but who knows what hidden events are still to come.

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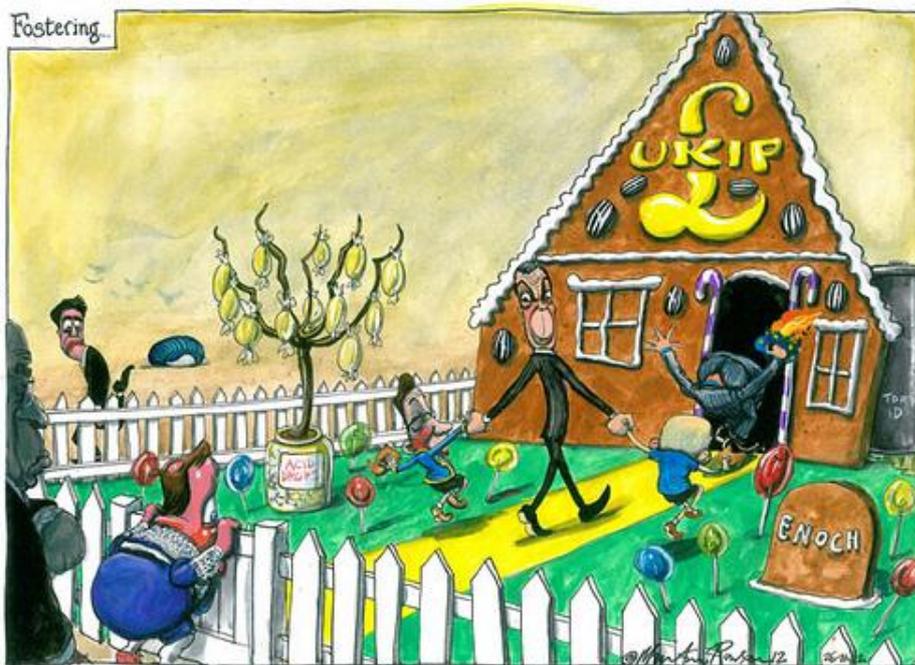
Regional Board Member/Chair TULO

Sources of information/acknowledgments

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Author's footnote

As a person deeply rooted in the Labour movement, I am only worried about UKIP's ability to tap into discontent among our support; this has so far proven to be limited. More important, is that our party and our movement restore trust in politics by rebuilding itself and later, in government, tackling the conditions that fuel anti-political rage.



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