What is the United Kingdom Independence Party?

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23 June 2004

The rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the recent European elections in Britain must serve as a serious warning.

In the absence of an independent socialist perspective for unifying the European continent, it has been possible for UKIP to channel anger and hostility at the European Union and its bureaucratic, pro-big business policies in a right-wing direction.

UKIP doubled its vote in 1999, coming third in the national poll. Its success has seen it hailed as a major new force in British politics, even a potential "king maker". The *Telegraph* described UKIP's result as potentially Britain's "Pim Fortuyn moment"—a reference to the success in May 2002 of the right-wing, anti-immigrant party List Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands following the assassination of its leader, which took second place in the country's general election.

The bubble burst very rapidly for the List Pim Fortuyn. Within a year it had lost two-thirds of its support at the polls. But its primary achievement was to shift Dutch politics to the right by legitimising a political programme based on anti-immigrant demagogy and a law and order offensive, combined with swinging attacks on social welfare, which was quickly adopted by the official parties.

It is by no means clear what UKIP's own future will be. An amalgam of right-wing Tories and neo-fascists, which has attracted disaffected voters from across the political spectrum, it is a highly unstable formation. But whatever its long-term fate, it too is providing a vehicle for shifting politics in Britain sharply to the right.

UKIP was able to exploit hostility amongst a significant section of the population towards the European Union as an undemocratic gravy train for faceless bureaucrats, and to present itself as the only party prepared to defy the tripartite consensus that has been established around the vexed question of Britain's relationship with Europe.

However, UKIP represents a socially regressive, nationalist and xenophobic opposition to the EU. Its sloganeering in defence of "British national sovereignty" and the "people's rights" hides a programme dedicated to promoting economic and social nostrums that uphold only the "rights" of the employers, i.e., those based on glorifying a US-style dog-eat-dog society, the destruction of all welfare provisions, eliminating all legal restrictions on big business and a trade and defence alliance with Washington to further the predatory aims of British imperialism.

Bankrolled for the most part by Paul Sykes, a Yorkshire property tycoon, and Alan Brown, a businessman from Kent, UKIP was long regarded as a "fringe" party. Its almost religious promotion of the supposed legacy of Margaret Thatcher translated into denunciations of the EU as a haven of welfare policies that it deemed as a conspiracy by "statists" to undermine the "Anglo-Saxon" model of "free enterprise".

The central feature of UKIP is its hostility to any efforts to regulate the more rapacious demands of big business. As regards Europe, UKIP claims that Thatcher was correct to support the creation of the Single European Market as a bastion of unregulated capitalism. But since then the EU has continued as a bastion of state regulation that threatens to undermine or even reverse the economic transformation of Britain into a deregulated low corporate tax haven it became under the Tories' former leader.

This policy is combined with the traditional anti-immigrant demagogy of the right, which provides a convenient scapegoat for the social disaffection created by the very policies UKIP espouses.

Such policies echo many of those held by the Conservatives and Labour, both of whom support only those aspects of EU policy that serve the efforts of the major transnational corporations and banks to more effectively exploit working people across Europe. They too are, like UKIP, hostile to any attempts to integrate Europe in a way that would see it develop as a serious rival to US imperialism—fearing that this would undermine Britain's traditional role as a "bridge" between Europe and the US, and weaken it against its main continental rivals.

But UKIP wants to go much further than to engage in trench warfare against France and Germany. It wants an end to what is viewed as a half-hearted compromise and insists on full and immediate withdrawal from the EU.

The immediate origins of UKIP lie in the fallout within the Tory party after the pound was forced out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in 1992. The divisions within the Tories over whether to remain within the EU had split the entire party, to the point where some of those supporting withdrawal were prepared to break ranks on the issue.

UKIP's recent success is the product of the general rightward shift of the establishment parties and their corresponding loss of any significant social base within broader layers of the population, coupled with increasing tensions between Europe and America over the Iraq war and its aftermath.

Under the Bush administration, the United States has ended its previous policy of supporting European integration under the Franco-German alliance in favour of more directly asserting its own role as a continental power. It has done so by reinforcing its relations with the Labour government of Tony Blair in Britain, and also championing the accession countries in Eastern Europe as the representatives of a "new Europe" opposed to the "old" European powers.

UKIP has staked a claim as the most determined representative of this policy within Britain. It adopted the pound sign as its party symbol to emphasise its hostility to the euro, which is viewed by Washington as the only potential challenger to the supremacy of the dollar. And UKIP's campaign in the European elections focused on opposition to the attempts by France and Germany to secure agreement on a European constitution they hope will finally enable the EU to secure an independent, political presence on the world stage.

This provided UKIP with an unprecedented level of financial backing and the assistance in coordinating its election campaign of Dick Morris, formerly US President Bill Clinton's top adviser who has since emerged as a leading voice of the Republican right, an advocate of aggressive US unilateralism and a bitter opponent of the EU.

Writing in the *Telegraph* in 2003 Morris complained, "The political

lesson of the war in Iraq is that the people of America and Britain have far more in common with one another than do the British people with the French or the Germans."

Following UKIP's recent electoral success he urged support for its stance in the US in the publication the *Hill*. He asked, "Why should we in the colonies care? Because the forces that have hijacked the EU are steering it into a socialist economy, an appeasement-oriented foreign policy, a jury-less judiciary and a move away from government by democracy toward rule by bureaucracy".

To describe the EU as socialist is ludicrous, but such red-baiting is designed to play well amongst the party's and Morris's own target audience of right-wing ideologues gathered around the Bush White House, alongside his denunciations of "labour laws that prohibit dismissals and require gigantic vacation and other fringe benefits".

Morris continued, "For the United States, bereft of reliable allies in the Paris-Berlin-dominated Europe, the move toward Ronald Reagan-Margaret Thatcher policies in the UK can only come as a positive omen for the future".

Reagan-Thatcher policies do not bode at all well for the people of the UK, however, as they know only too well from their experiences of Conservative and Labour governments over the last two decades, which have resulted in a major redistribution of wealth away from the poor to the rich.

This goes some way to explaining the UKIP's concentration on the single issue of the EU. Without this, it would have great difficulty in finding any popular base whatsoever for an otherwise open advocacy of hard-line Thatcherism.

But a hard-line Thatcherite party is precisely what UKIP is. It has become a means through which a political regroupment has taken place between die-hard Thatcherites and a layer of the far right that previously gravitated around more or less openly fascist formations.

UKIP was founded at the London School of Economics in 1993 by Dr Alan Sked, formerly a member of the Anti-Federalist League and the "Brugge Group", which regarded the decision of Thatcher's successor, John Major, to sign up to the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 as a betrayal of her legacy. Sked subsequently returned to the Conservatives.

UKIP's present leader Roger Knapman, a former whip under Major who lost his seat in 1997, and newly elected MEP (Member of the European Parliament) Ashley Mote—author of the xenophobic tome *Vigilance and Overcrowded Britain*—were featured speakers at the Conservative Democratic Alliance (CDA) fringe meeting at the Tory party conference in October 2002.

The CDA, which describes itself as the "Real Conservatives", was set up in 2001 after the traditional home of the Tory right, the Monday Club, was suspended due to its open racism. According to the anti-fascist journal *Searchlight*, CDA's leadership includes Sam Swerling, a former Monday Club chairman and a member of the Campaign for an Independent Britain, and Stuart Millson, who left the Tories in 1986 to join the fascist British National Party and who set up the Revolutionary Conservative Caucus in 1992.

Knapman and Mote were joined on the platform by Derek Turner, editor of *Right Now*, published by Taki Theodorcopulous who has described General Augusto Pinochet as "the saviour of Chile".

Completing the line up was Adrian Davies, barrister for the historian and holocaust denier David Irving. Formerly an executive member of the Monday Club, according to *Searchlight* Davies chairs the Freedom Party, whose roots lie in an internal feud in the British National Party, and coordinates the Bloomsbury Foundation.

The Bloomsbury Foundation was formed in 1996 out of former supporters of the Western Goals Institute UK, which had the support of such notorious individuals as Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, leader of El Salvador's death squads, and Clive Derby-Lewis, vice president of the South African Conservative party who was imprisoned for life for his role in murdering South African Communist Party leader Chris Hani.

According to *Searchlight*, the Bloomsbury Foundation's objective is to replicate the efforts of Jean Marie Le Penn's National Front in France by creating an intellectual and political framework for British fascism, and transforming this "into a political reality, be it within the Conservative Party, a modernised BNP [British National Party] or even a new party altogether".

Some current and former members of the UKIP executive have also previously been active in the New Britain Party, a pro-Rhodesia and anti-immigrant party.

In 1997 Mark Deavin, a UKIP national executive committee member was exposed as a covert member of the BNP and in February 2002, Alistair Machonochie was expelled from the UKIP for Holocaust denial.

In the runup to their latest campaign UKIP secured the support of eleven Conservative hereditary peers, including the Earl of Shrewsbury. He was subsequently one of four peers to lose the Tory whip. UKIP also gained the backing of several former Conservative MPs and local councillors. In the south west of England the party benefited from a significant vote in the British enclave of Gibraltar, situated off Spain, due to the patriotic fervour that dominates political life on "The Rock".

UKIP found its ideal public face in the person of Robert Kilroy-Silk, a former Labour MP, professional witch-hunter of the left, and a day time talk show host who was forced to resign from his BBC show after he wrote a racist diatribe denouncing Arabs as "suicide bombers, limb amputators, women repressors" who had contributed nothing to the world except oil.

The extent of UKIP's supposed popular appeal should not be overestimated. It won 16 percent of the vote, but only in an election with a 40 percent turnout. And though it boasts of securing votes from across the political spectrum—from former supporters of "all parties and none"—over half its supporters were in fact former Conservatives.

But UKIP's further growth is not excluded, given the absence of a progressive alternative to the pro-business policies of the three major parties. UKIP has benefited from the continuing break up of the Conservative Party, but it did in part succeed in making a pitch for broader sections of disaffected voters.

This is entirely due to the fact that no party advanced an opposition to the European Union based on a defence of the independent political interests of the working class. Invariably just two perspectives were on offer in the elections—either support for an EU drawn up at the behest of big business, or a nationalist opposition to the EU based on the interests of competing sections of capital.

The United Socialist States of Europe is the only conceivable alternative to the social devastation and right-wing reaction that is the common agenda of all sections of the bourgeoisie in Britain, Europe and America.

The necessary, progressive unification of Europe can only be carried through against the ruling elites on a socialist programme that would enable the utilisation of the continents resources to meet the needs of the vast majority of the population. This means to counterpose to all those who advocate unity with one or another section of the ruling class, a united offensive of the European and international working class against those who exploit them.

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