

The right-wing nationalism of the United Kingdom Independence Party

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The promotion of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the lead-up to the European elections in May is part of a strategy within ruling circles in Britain and across Europe to move politics sharply to the right. (See “France’s new government: A political turning point for Europe”)

Over the last months there has been a concerted media campaign to promote the anti-immigrant and nationalist policies of UKIP as the expression of popular sentiment. Despite the party not having a single representative in parliament, UKIP leader Nigel Farage was given two prime television spots to supposedly debate the pros and cons of the European Union with Deputy Prime Minister and Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg. (See: “BBC debates between Clegg and Farage: A political fraud”) Britain’s broadcast regulator has announced that UKIP is to be given “major party status” for the elections, meaning it could expect to receive as much air time as the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties.

This is all political manipulation.

UKIP portrays itself as the defender of ordinary people. As it writes on its web site, “the EU (European Union) is only the biggest symptom of the real problem—the theft of our democracy by a powerful, remote political ‘elite’ which has forgotten that it’s here to serve the people.”

But its anti-establishment pose has no basis in reality. Formed in 1993, the anti-European Union, “free trade” party has historically drawn most of its support from the right-wing sections of the Conservative Party, including Farage himself who is a former commodities trader.

To the extent that it has been able to pick up support among sections of workers hostile to the European bourgeoisie’s agenda of mass austerity and war, this is entirely the responsibility of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy and their political apologists amongst pseudo-left organisations such as Left Unity, which function as cheerleaders for the big business EU.

UKIP, in fact, speaks for a layer of the British ruling elite that regards the EU—and the economic and political domination within it of Germany in particular—as a

constraint on the pursuit of its national interests. Although the majority of the business elite continue to support EU membership, a recent British Chambers of Commerce survey shows that 57 percent are in favour of increased powers to be returned to Westminster. Much of this centres on their support for reducing so-called “red tape” especially as concerns workers’ rights—most of which have already been ripped up anyway thanks to the EU-dictated austerity measures.

UKIP is not opposed to such attacks. Far from it. In an interview earlier this year published on the *Daily Telegraph* web site, Farage stated, “Given the mess we’re in, everything needs to be on the table and thought about.”

Its programme is for savage cuts to the National Health Service, education and pensions, and an end to ring-fenced budgets in order to pay over vast sums to the super-rich and major corporations. Last year, it called for an additional £77 billion in cuts on top of those imposed by the Tories and Lib-Dems, coupled with cuts to corporation tax and the abolition of inheritance taxes. Going further still, it wanted a flat rate income tax so that billionaires would pay the same rate as nurses and an end to national insurance. It actively seeks the destruction of the NHS through the use of public money to provide vouchers for people to use private health care and educational institutions.

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat government’s attempt to slash immigration numbers to Britain has also been attacked from the right by UKIP as not going far enough. It calls for a five year ban on granting permanent residency and stricter controls on allowing migrants into the country. Farage has scapegoated immigrant workers for the social and economic crisis, claiming that there is a “labour surplus” in Britain due to mass immigration.

This has been coupled with calls for strengthening state security. An additional 20,000 border guards should be brought in to clamp down on attempts to enter Britain, it argues, and holding centres set up for asylum seekers.

While Farage has made noises opposing the EU’s aggressive moves against Russia over the Ukraine, this is

only a tactical dispute, which reflects its dissatisfaction at civilian influence over the army.

As a 2013 UKIP defence policy document declared, “A new defence ministry will be created, with primacy given to the Central Staff over civil servants. The civilian role in framing policy and strategy will cease and be left to educated military professionals.”

Describing the current state of Britain’s armed forces as “woefully under resourced”, the policy declared, “As the UK regains its place as an independent global trading nation, we will need to ensure that we can defend our trade, and our independence.” To this end UKIP has called for a massive 40 percent increase in military spending.

Given such a programme, it is not surprising that Farage’s attempts to draw a dividing line between UKIP and the far right across Europe do not stand up to scrutiny. Since 2009, UKIP MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) have sat in a parliamentary fraction called Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD). The alliance permits the group access to committee positions, speaking time and EU funding, and they publish statements and organise events.

EFD includes Greece’s Laos Party, a far-right organisation which has a record of anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial and aggressive anti-immigrant chauvinism. In 2011, Laos joined the unelected Greek caretaker government of Lucas Papademos, which played a critical role in imposing vicious austerity measures demanded by the international financial elite.

The grouping also includes Italy’s Lega Nord, advocating greater powers for the more prosperous northern Italy so that taxes for business can be cut. Lega Nord’s leading members have gained a reputation for racist denunciations of immigrants. Another member is the Slovakian National Party (SNS), whose predecessors collaborated with the Nazis during World War II. The SNS and Lega Nord have been in discussions with Marine Le Pen’s Front National and Geerd Wilders’ Freedom Party over forming a far-right bloc after the European elections, a move from which UKIP has publicly distanced itself.

Positions associated with the extreme right are also to be found among UKIP members. Gerrard Batten, a founding member of UKIP and member of its national executive, sought to organise the screening of Wilders anti-Islamic film *Fitna* in the European Parliament in late 2008. A decision was taken by the parliament to ban its showing at the last minute. Earlier this year, Batten told the *Guardian* that Europe was witnessing an explosion of mosques and that Muslims in Britain should have to sign a charter renouncing violence.

In a book published last month entitled *Revolt on the Right*, political researchers Robert Ford and Matthew

Goodwin noted that significant numbers of voters who previously backed the fascist British National Party (BNP) have transferred their loyalty to UKIP. A recent *Guardian* article by the pair notes, “Aware that (BNP leader) Nick Griffin’s party was rapidly imploding, Farage and his deputy Paul Nuttall set out to win over BNP voters.”

UKIP’s promotion as a respectable alternative to the political establishment has been legitimised by calls from several “left” commentators for a left-wing version of the party to be established, based on UKIP’s opposition to the EU and a nationalist programme. Last September in the *Guardian*, John Harris asked, “Is it time for a left-wing version of UKIP?”

The Socialist Equality Party decisively rejects the claim that there is anything progressive in the right-wing nationalism advanced by UKIP. Opposition to the EU on the basis of a strengthened nation state, and the return to national currencies as advocated by UKIP’s allies in countries using the euro, would have no less catastrophic consequences for the working class than remaining within the EU.

The lie that opposition to the EU automatically equates to the defence of the nation state must be rejected with contempt. The SEP refuses to allow UKIP and its right-wing allies across the continent to claim to represent the entirely justified hostility felt by millions of workers towards Brussels and its undemocratic institutions.

The only progressive basis upon which such opposition can be taken forward is through the international unification of the working class in the fight for the abolition of the EU, the creation of workers’ governments in its member states and the establishment of the United Socialist States of Europe.



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