

Labour embraces UK Independence Party's right-wing nationalism

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The victory by the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in the May European elections in Britain and its strong gains in local elections have prompted the Labour Party to move even further to the right and adopt many of UKIP's core positions.

Labour leader Ed Miliband reacted to UKIP's performance by solidarising himself with its anti-immigrant and nationalist programme. According to Miliband in a speech last week, "it is not prejudiced to worry about immigration, it is understandable."

Speaking in Thurrock, Essex, where UKIP had made major gains in the elections at Labour's expense, Miliband continued, "It's not right wing for us to talk about immigration."

Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls urged Labour to talk about the issue of immigration more loudly.

What they mean by "talking about immigration" was illustrated in an article by Jon Cruddas, Labour MP and one of the party's most prominent intellectuals, in the *Guardian* in the run-up to the elections. In it, he claimed that UKIP was a legitimate representative of the "disenfranchised English."

Laying out his advice to Labour, he argued that politics is "about building a sense of belonging and purpose and pride in one's country. Labour is the party of the people and it wins when it is patriotic."

Lord Glasman, a close Miliband ally, in an interview with the *Daily Telegraph*, defended UKIP Leader Nigel Farage's anti-immigrant comments.

Glasman and Cruddas were leading figures in the formation of the Blue Labour faction, whose programme was summed up with the slogan "Flag, Faith and Family." Its outlook has heavily influenced Miliband. In a series of speeches since 2012, he has emphasised Labour's "one nation" credentials. In the recently concluded election campaign, he identified

immigration as one of the party's main issues.

In the wake of the elections, leading figures within the party stepped up their calls for a full embrace of UKIP policies. Not satisfied with Miliband's speech appealing to anti-immigrant sentiment, seven Labour MPs signed an open letter published last Sunday in the *Observer* urging a harder line on immigration. The signatories, including former government minister Frank Field, demanded that a Labour government move to restrict the freedom of movement of people from countries in the European Union with lower income levels than Britain. They added that they were confident of winning broader support among the Labour parliamentary group in the coming weeks.

In an "open letter to UKIP voters" printed in the right-wing *Daily Express*, Labour's justice spokesman Sadiq Khan apologised for Labour's record on immigration. "We were too quick to dismiss concerns about immigration, or even worse, accused people of being prejudiced," he wrote.

The embrace of a nationalist programme is also evident in other policy areas. Douglas Alexander, Labour's shadow foreign secretary, wrote in a letter to Prime Minister David Cameron that if in government, Labour would seek to strengthen the power of national parliaments to block unwanted EU legislation, clamp down on welfare benefits allegedly going to people living abroad and do more to cut spending within the EU.

So far to the right has the debate moved within Labour that the *Guardian* felt it necessary to create the impression of an internal struggle within the party over its rightward shift. No less than former prime minister and arch-warmonger Tony Blair was cited as an opponent of embracing UKIP's anti-immigrant nationalism, cautioning against its impact on "21st

century Britain.”

Blair’s concern over such policies is related to his defence of Britain’s global position and the financial sector in the City of London. Anti-immigrant policies would not result in “economic prosperity or power and influence in the world,” he told the BBC, a goal he believes can best be served by remaining in the EU and keeping London open for business.

The fraudulent character of Blair’s opposition is best illustrated by the record of his government. While he now criticises some of the worst excesses of the anti-immigrant propaganda which is dominating official political discourse, Blair’s period in office saw the repeated exploitation of chauvinist sentiments against asylum seekers and immigrants. In what marked one of the first shots in a more general offensive against social welfare, the availability of benefits to immigrants was restricted.

The open embrace by Labour of positions traditionally associated with the extreme right has much in common with other former social democratic parties across Europe. Earlier this year, French President and Socialist Party (PS) leader François Hollande responded to the growing influence of the neofascist National Front by appointing Manuel Valls as his Prime Minister. A right-winger within the PS, Valls has earned a reputation for harsh anti-immigrant policies.

Under these conditions, an especially pernicious role is being played by elements within Labour and their pseudo-left defenders who claim that the sole threat on the right comes from UKIP.

A cross-party immigration think tank, Migration Matters, which also includes the trade unions, launched an anti-UKIP campaign during the elections that presented the entire political establishment, including Labour, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, as defenders of democracy against the threat from UKIP as a “racist party.”

This illusion has also been promoted by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which has played a leading role in promoting the “Stand up to UKIP” group. Composed of trade union bureaucrats and figures such as Labour MP Diane Abbott, the aim of this coalition is to give a political amnesty to Labour and the trade union bureaucracy ahead of national elections next year.

The alliance with a party which is adopting wholesale UKIP’s anti-immigrant, nationalist programme is

linked to the hostility towards class politics among these layers and their open embrace of the most reactionary forms of identity politics. Thus the “Stand up to UKIP” founding statement, which is signed by Unite trade union leader Len McCluskey, is given pride of place in the *Socialist Worker*. It proclaims, “Stand up to UKIP is an umbrella organisation which believes it is important for women, trade unions, anti-racists, black, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, LGBT, young people, students and all good people must unite and stand up to UKIP, racism and bigotry.”

While open to political collaboration with “all good people,” including those who deceive the population with their talk of opposing the radical right even as they adopt its programme in practice, the one force the SWP is vehemently opposed to mobilising—and which doesn’t even rate a mention in its statement—is the international working class.



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