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THE RADICAL RIGHT IN BRITAIN: THE UK INDEPENDENCE PARTY – A NEW FORCE IN POLITICS OR A POLITICAL SOUFFLÉ?

Weston C.

President

Weston Consulting, Warsaw, Poland.

Метою роботи є вивчення підйому правих радикалів, а саме Партії незалежності Сполученого Королівства від її заснування в 1993 році до формування найбільшої англійської політичної партії в даний час в Європейському парламенті і обрання свого першого члена в Палату громад в жовтні цього року.

Целью работы является изучение подъема правых радикалов, а именно Партия независимости Соединённого Королевства от ее основания в 1993 году до формирования наибольшей английской политической партии в настоящее время в Европейском парламенте и избрания своего первого члена в Палату общин в октябре этого года.

The purpose of the paper is to examine the rise of the radical right, in the form of the UK Independence Party, from its origins in 1993 to constituting the largest UK political party currently in the European Parliament and the recent election of its first member of parliament to the House of Commons in October of this year.

The paper will examine the rise of this party in the light of social trends in the UK over the last fifty years and, in particular, the emergence of a group termed the “left behind” arising from the decline of Britain’s working class, the impact of changing social values and the increased marginalisation of this group whose distinguishing traits are: less skilled, economically insecure, less well educated and old. Its increased electoral support will also be examined in the context of its European neighbours which has seen increases in popular support for the National Front in France, the Northern League in Italy and the Freedom Party in Austria, as well as the Tea Party in the USA.

We will also briefly examine, as a case study, the course of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in the 1980s which saw hopes of a breakthrough by a third political “force” in the wake of a number of stunning by election victories but which was ultimately subsumed into the Liberal Democrat Party, a partner in the present governing coalition. The failure for the SDP to make a breakthrough has important implications for the future of UKIP as it seeks to “break the mould” of British politics today.

Ключові слова: Партія незалежності Сполученого Королівства, робочий клас, Великобританія, радикальні праві.

The Ascent of UKIP: From modest origins to Euro election success and beyond

UKIP was established in a common room in the London School of Economics in 1993 by a history lecturer, Dr Alan Sked. The party had its origins as an anti European pressure group and, to a considerable extent, has remained faithful to this core issue throughout its history. For the first decade of its existence, it participated in 25% of the parliamentary elections and achieved just 1.7% of the vote [4, p2]. During this period, it competed with the Referendum Party, another anti European political grouping, established by an Anglo French businessman, James Goldsmith, as well as the more extreme right wing party, the British National Party, which had “inherited the mantle” of the racist National Front. We can view this decade as more a period of “survival” as a start up party sought to overcome bouts of leadership infighting as well as its limited resources in terms of personnel and finances – it should be remembered that to fight a parliamentary seat required a deposit of £ 500 which would be forfeit if not enough votes were secured..

Oddly enough its anti European stance would to a considerable degree be the “saviour” of the party as the elections to the European Parliament would provide UKIP with a platform to raise its political profile. Such elections were generally held in the midst of widespread electoral apathy and low turnouts; they were fought under proportional representation rules which provided less of a “barrier to entry” for minority parties which struggled under the normal “first-past-the-post” system reserved for UK parliamentary and local elections; and thus European elections represented an opportunity for disaffected voters to register a protest against the governing party whilst reserving their position for the more important general elections.

The abovementioned benefits and drawbacks of such electoral systems ie European elections versus UK parliamentary, can be demonstrated as follows [4, p4]: in 2004, UKIP achieved 2.6

million votes and 16.1% of the national vote in the European elections but just 2% of the national vote in the 2005 General Election when it gained no seats; and in 2009, it achieved 2.5 million votes and 16.5% of the national vote in the European elections but 3.1 % of the national vote in the 2010 General Election when it again gained no seats.

The obvious question is whether going forward UKIP will continue as it has done so before: outperform in European elections but then “fade to grey” in the all important General Election. In May 2014 [4, p253], UKIP won 24 out of 73 seats in the European elections and became the largest party representing the UK. (UKIP had performed creditably in the 2013 local elections by achieving 1.1 million votes (three times that of 2009); 24% of the vote – up 8% over 2009 and gaining 147 county councillors with 827 second places). In October 2014, it gained its first elected UK member of parliament when Douglas Carswell won the by – election in Clacton caused by his resignation from the Conservative Party. Of perhaps greater significance (to be considered later below), UKIP’s candidate came within 517 votes of winning the Labour Party seat of Heywood and Middleton in October. At this by-election, UKIP had increased its share of the vote by 36%.

In order to understand whether UKIP is equipped to meet this challenge, it is worth looking at their rise in the context of political and social developments in the UK, as well as its foreign comparators, as well as the experience of another minority party, the SDP which, like UKIP, aimed to “break the mould” of British politics in the 1980s by challenging the longstanding, incumbent political duopoly of the Conservative and Labour Parties.

The Hollowing of Democracy?

Peter Mair, one of leading political scientists in Britain, commented in his last book [8, p1] that “the age of democracy has passed”. He drew attention to the popular withdrawal and disengagement from conventional politics that was pointing to a cross-national convergence between the UK and the rest of Western Europe. He cited four particular factors, which are addressed in their turn [8, p23-37]:

Electoral turnout

He noted that electoral turnouts in Western Europe had only marginally shifted between the 1950s and the 1980s from 84.3% to 81.7% but thereafter the change has been significant. By the last decade of the twentieth century, average turnouts had dropped to 77.6% and then to 75.8% in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Indeed, the UK saw its electoral turnout decrease from 77% in 1955 to 65% in 2010. In 2001, the election of Tony Blair’s second government actually saw the turnout drop to just 59% before recovering for the 2005 General Election.

Electoral volatility

Mair noted that those continuing to participate in such elections had become “more volatile, more uncertain and more random” in their expression of political preferences. Indeed, he notes that volatility markedly increased in the 1990s and 2000s.

This has also translated into electors seeking to “diversify” away from the two main political parties at election times. Causes for this phenomenon are many-fold ranging from the decision of the third party, the Liberal Democrats, to fight more parliamentary seats than before and go for “national coverage” to the rise of nationalist parties, such as the Scottish Nationalist Party and Plaid Cymru in Wales.

As an indicator [17, p74-5], the two main parties together accounted for 97% of the national vote in 1951; 89% in 1970; 75% in 1974; and just 65% in 2010 when the General Election led to the creation of a coalition involving the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

Partisan identification

Based on the research of Russell Dalton, Mair [8, p35-7] noted that this had also fallen dramatically over the last two decades. Wright [17, p74-5] notes this phenomenon as constituting “partisan dealignment” as those identifying their class with a particular party fell from 45% of respondents in the 1960s to just 11% in the 2000s.

Oddbjorn Knutsen [7] has also pointed to the substantial decline in class voting throughout Western Europe since the mid 1970s.

Party membership

A further indicator of the downward trend in political engagement can be found in party membership. In the 1950s, the Conservative Party had three million members while the Labour Party had one million [17, p83].

Mair [8, p41] cites a study that shows that party membership in thirteen long-established democracies has fallen from 9.8% of the electorate to 5.7% by the end of the 1990s. Both the UK and France saw falls in membership of one million and in the UK’s case, membership decreased by 66% between 1980 and 2009. The UK currently has just 1% of the electorate as members of

political parties – one of the lowest proportions in Europe. By one measure, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has more members than all the British political parties put together!

A consequence of the above is that UK elections were being won on a share of the vote that would have lost elections in the past. For example, the Conservative Party (under Margaret Thatcher) won a landslide in 1983 with a share of the vote less than when it lost in 1964; the Labour Party (under Tony Blair) gained landslides in 1997 and 2001 with a share of the vote less than when it lost the election in 1959 [17, p75].

The UK's "first-past-the-post" electoral system had disguised the mounting problems faced above by Britain of low turnouts, increased electoral volatility, class and partisan dealignment and falling party membership rolls, and had, as a result, preserved two-party dominance. The price to be paid however was the emergence of, in the words of Bernard Manin, an "audience democracy" [9].

The Decline and Fall of the British working class and the emergence of the "left behind" group

One of the factors noted above was that of class dealignment and how people who belonged to a "class" would vote for their "natural" class party. For example, 63% voted for their "natural" class party in 1964 when the Labour Party under Harold Wilson but just 41% did in 2005 when Tony Blair won his third General Election [17, p76]. This trend was to be reflected in Britain's working class which has witnessed profound changes in its make up over the past fifty years as society has evolved. This can be demonstrated by reference to the following table [4, p114-7]:

Proportion of working class	19	19	20
	64	97	12
Proportion blue collar	50	33	29
	%	%	%
Proportion lacking formal education	70	50	36
	%	%	%
Proportion Trade Union members	40	20	18
	%	%	%
Proportion living in state owned council house	30	14	10
	%	%	%

The working class had been transformed from mainly blue collar to a more professional, middle "white collar" class over the period. A considerable amount of the decline came about from the Thatcher period of government when council houses were sold to tenants and the major industries of coal, steel, shipbuilding and manufacturing were restructured or "went under". Indeed, the trade union membership figures above understate the "true" picture of the transformation wrought given union membership is more concentrated in the public sector (white collar) workforces of health service and education sectors.

Such social trends have also been visible in the area of educational attainment: in 1964, for every one person who went to university, fourteen left school; but in 2010, these proportions were equal ie for every one who left school, one went to university.

Over the period of the Labour government from 1997 to 2007, despite the appearance of increased economic prosperity for all, the UK manufacturing sector shed over 1.2 million jobs despite there being no recession, unlike the job losses suffered in this sector during the Thatcher years in 1979-82 and following the Lawson boom of 1986. The prosperity of the era served to disguise the nature on the ongoing transformation in British social and economic structures as a result of globalization and integration with the European market, as well as the accession of Central and Eastern European states to the European Union leading to increased immigration to the country.

Political changes had also left "their mark". Adam Przeworski had noted that the manual work force was shrinking throughout Europe from the 1980s onwards [12]. The British Labour Party had lost the 1979 General Election and was to remain out of power for the next eighteen years. The 1983 General Election had seen the Labour Party's share of the vote collapse to its worst in history as it was pressed by a new "third force" in politics, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), as noted below, the rebound in Mrs Thatcher's popularity following the Falklands War and an upturn in the economy, and the widely unpopular policies (and derided image) of its party leader, Michael Foot. The Labour Party, particularly under Tony Blair's leadership (from 1994) was to strive for middle class votes but this was to come at the cost of the left's traditional voters who were to opt for more radical parties. Przeworski [12] had predicted that when socialist parties attempted to increase electoral support beyond the working class, they reduced their capacity to mobilize the workers. A

hallmark of the “New Labour” governments in power post 1997 was the pursuit of “Thatcher like” policies and its leaders during this period become known as the “Sons of Thatcher” [5].

According to Ford & Goodwin [4, p108], millions of Old Labour voters stayed at home in parliamentary elections – note the low 2001 turnout above, or increasingly flirted with the racist policies of the British National Party. In particular, immigration started to emerge as an important issue for voters, particularly in the traditional Labour held, northern cities. As the “most important” issue, immigration had gone from being so ranked by 11.3% of respondents in 2000, to 21% in 2002 and 31% in 2005. Net migration, which had been effectively nil during the Major Government of 1991-97, had increased to net inflows of 200,000 per annum by the mid 2000s, particularly from the new members of the European Union from Central and Eastern Europe.

Attempts by the Conservative Party to capitalise on anti immigration in the 2001 and 2005 elections had failed to “gain traction” with the electorate who viewed the party with deep distrust after their period in office during the 1990s [13, p306¹]. The election of David Cameron as the Conservative Party in 2005 and his pursuit of “Compassionate Conservatism” would not attract disaffected Labour voters [2]. With both main parties preferring to aim for middle class voters and “pitching their message” accordingly, blue collar workers appeared increasingly marginalized in election terms.

Hans-Georg Best [14, chap 6] had noted in the European context the increased support for the populist right among blue collar workers. Indeed, in France, the Front National had seen its support from the manual workers rise from 8% in 1984 to over 30% of all manual workers supporting it in 1995. In 2012, Marine le Pen was the preferred Presidential candidate of the working class. Such trends were not limited solely to France. In Austria, the Freedom Party attracted one out of four working class voters; the Northern League had made considerable inroads into the trade unions in Italy; the Danish People’s Party has achieved similar a 30% level of support from unskilled workers. According to Mair [8, p19], each of these parties shared expressions of xenophobia, racism and cultural defence but also a very explicit hostility to the national political class.

Therefore, contrary to perceptions of UKIP as a “refuge” of disaffected Conservative party members dismayed by the “compassionate conservatism” of David Cameron, particularly in the light of the Coalition government since 2010, it has, in line with a number of its European counterparts, attracted the support of Traditional “Old Labour” voters who have endured rapid social change, and who feel directly the threat of the European Union through its endorsement of immigration (“free movement of labour”) and apparent indifference to “national identity” in favour of the “European ideal”. Indeed, the results of the council elections in 2013 suggested that UKIP was taking more votes from Labour [4, p95].

The late 1990s and 2000s would witness a considerable change in the country’s culture and social mores. Whilst there had been immigration before that attracted both public and political attention (as for example in the famous “rivers of blood” speech by Enoch Powell²) in the 1960s and early 1970s, the levels of immigration experienced in the 2000s were of a wholly different dimension. From 1997 to 2007 [1, p104], around 1.1 million migrants came to work in Britain, although some estimates put that figure at 1.6 million – twice the figure the government had initially reported. Such immigration seemed, by its very magnitude, to penetrate all regions of the country and not just the wealthy south-east. Politicians were taken by surprise by the numbers involved and appeared unable to control the influx. Not all immigrants appeared hard working (or even benign if taking jobs at low wages) in the eyes of their local neighbours– in 2007, it was reported that 112,000 were claiming social benefits and this figure was expected to double in 2008.

Furthermore, whilst the government had spent considerable amounts of money on public services, such as the education and health services, this was barely enough to cope with the demands of a population inflated by migrants let alone the demographic and health needs faced by the local population.

A further set of complications arose in respect of coloured minorities, with particular emphasis on those from south east asia, in the light of a rise in terrorism. The London Underground bombings in July 2005, committed by individuals who had either been granted asylum or had lived in the country for some time, would also feed into a “developing narrative” about British “culture and values” being threatened by Islamic “outsiders”. The recent reports of child exploitation in northern

¹ According to Rawnsley: “the heavy emphasis on immigration made them [ie the Conservatives] look opportunistic, monomaniac and unattractive to centrist and floating voters”.

² “As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood’ “ Enoch Powell speaking about immigration and race relations, Birmingham, 20 April 1968. He was dismissed from the Shadow Cabinet given the ensuing controversy. See R Shepherd, *E Powell: A Biography*, Pimlico, UK, 1997, chapter 15.

towns¹ by Asian immigrants being covered up by local elites on the grounds of “political correctness” to avoid charges of racism has compounded this narrative of locals and the British “way of life” being threatened by alien mores and criminal behaviours by “foreigners” tolerated by the political class at large.

Interestingly, the Labour Government under Gordon Brown from 2007 appeared to sense this issue with Prime Minister Brown seeking to promote “British values”, although it became increasingly evident what this actually meant. Claims of immigrants being “preferred” as employees to locals was answered by a curious statement by the government, more akin to the British National Party than one of the centre-left, of seeking “British jobs for British workers” [13, p502]. Governments of Brown and later Cameron were seeking to engage in such rhetoric safe in the knowledge that they could do very little to address public concerns due to constraints by domestic legislation or that enshrined in treaties and obligations to the European Union.

This brand of Euroscepticism and hostility towards immigrants (as the seemingly “preferred” customers of public services) has been compounded by dissatisfaction with the established parties. This has translated into a perception of “remote elites” inside the Westminster “village” who care little about the concerns of the ordinary people [10]. This was highlighted by the instance in the 2010 General Election of Gordon Brown, the then Prime Minister, being caught on microphone referring to a lady² who had questioned him before as to the high levels of immigration, as a “bigot” [15, p445]! The “expenses scandal” that reported widespread abuses by members of all parties in parliament in 2009 had merely reinforced negative perceptions of a “political class” that seemed content only on enriching itself (and its backers in the City through substantial bailouts funded by taxpayers) while the public as a whole endured a drop in living standards not witnessed since the 1920s.

As noted, Euroscepticism and immigration linked to disaffection with the European Union but had been further supplemented by the poor performance of the economy, which appeared linked in people’s minds, to the ongoing economic crisis in Europe. All of these factors coexisted with an attitude which might be viewed as pessimistic and a dissatisfied outlook on the current state of affairs and the prospects for a brighter future – “we’ve never had it so bad”³.

“Profile” of the UKIP Supporter

Based on the British Election Continuous Monitoring Study of the period 2004 to 2013, the following characteristics were noted by Ford and Goodwin of a “typical” UKIP supporter [4, p153]:

Working class – 42%

Middle class - 30%

Left school at 16 or younger – 55%

Male – 57%

Aged 55+ | - 57%

White – 99.6%

With respect to working class, respectively 28%, 35% and 27% of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats voters surveyed belonged to this category.

With respect to leaving school at 16 or younger, respectively 36%, 40% and 31% of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats voters surveyed belonged to this category.

With respect to gender and ethnicity ie white, the percentages for UKIP were higher than the other three parties. The three parties ie Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat, were more balanced in their gender proportions.

With respect to age, respectively 44%, 34% and 35% of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats voters surveyed belonged to this category

Thus, we can observe on the basis of the survey data, UKIP’s “bedrock” of support lies with a group whose distinguishing traits are: less skilled, economically insecure, less well educated and old. But this also constitutes a potential threat to it in terms of expanding its future base of electoral support. It will need to appeal to the young, well educated, middle class and particularly to women if it is to significantly grow its electoral base.

In the light of the demographics noted above, it is also worth considering the results of surveys of Tea Party supporters in the USA which found that tea partiers were less educated, but more interested in politics [11]. As with sentiments expressed by UKIP supporters, they also found

¹ The scandal involving sexual exploitation of over 1,000 children took place over a decade in Rotherham, a town in South Yorkshire.

² This was known as the “Mrs Duffy debacle” after the woman involved. Mrs Duffy was a 65-year old Labour voter. The incident took place on 28 April 2010 during the General Election campaign.

³ Prime Minister Harold Macmillan informed prospective voters at a rally “they had never had it so good” on 20 July 1957.

extreme dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in the country - 92 % of tea partiers said they were dissatisfied with the way things were going.

Thus, in the UK, as elsewhere, there appeared to be a “revolt of the grey haired masses¹”, as an older generation adopted a view that “enough’s enough” with the political class who seemed so remote from their needs. UKIP thus constituted for many an opportunity to quite literally in electoral terms “stand up and be counted”. Its leader, in the form of Nigel Farage, a beer drinking and cigarette smoking² “cheeky chappie” appeared in strong contrast to the more elitist, highly groomed, “all things to all people”, leaders of the hitherto far too cozy, political duopoly in the current forms of Cameron and Miliband. (The Liberal Democrats were members of the governing coalition so would not be a means of delivering protest votes).

There is a paradox in the support by this group for UKIP in that its policies beyond Euroscepticism appear to be that of free trade and libertarian, which would not appear to fit with the profile of “protectionist”, anti globalization and socially conservative, with state intervention required for health and public services, that would appear to be the natural policies for this “left behind” group. It is a measure of both the antipathy felt for the typical political parties and its willingness to achieve its objectives through democratic ends that UKIP is the beneficiary of this mood, rather than more extreme right wing parties. Polling by Lord Ashcroft, the Conservative peer, suggests that UKIP’s support is driven by this group’s receptiveness to UKIP’s message about the state of British politics allied with deep pessimism [4, p118].

Despite the fact that Britain had exited recession and is expected to grow by 3% this year, according to a recent poll conducted by Populus [3], only one in seven British adults indicated that he/she could feel the benefits of the economic recovery where they live; this proportion rose to more than half in urban northern England (a key area of focus for UKIP) who said they could see no economic recovery where they live. Populus also found that 80% of UKIP supporters said Britain’s best days were in the past.

Indeed, it might be argued that this may yet transmute into “hopelessness without end” for a significant part of the population given the likelihood of additional economic austerity in the UK after the election in May 2015. The deficit ie government spending exceeding its revenues, is still at around £ 100 billion per annum. The main parties seem to either avoid discussion ie Labour³, or indicate that unfunded tax cuts for high income earners or reducing the inheritance tax burden ie Conservatives, will appeal to their own political constituencies as well as the “swing middle class voter” but for those in, say, the urban northern England and other depressed areas, the sense of “victimhood” will only increase as public spending cuts affect public services.

The SDP: A Warning from History?

Following the defeat of the Labour Party in 1979, concerns grew over the direction of the party and its drift towards unelectable left-wing policies under its new leader, Michael Foot. A number of former Labour Party figures announced the creation of the Social Democratic Party in 1981 [6]. Twenty-eight Labour MPs eventually joined the new party, along with one member of the Conservative Party. The party was successful in winning a number of parliamentary by-elections with impressive swings from voters away from the traditional two parties. Although the SDP was seen as being largely a breakaway from the Labour Party, it was estimated that 60% of its members had not belonged to a political party before, with 25% being drawn from Labour, 10% from the Conservatives and 5% from the Liberals.

¹ With apologies to Jose Ortega Y Gasset.

² Mr Farage has managed to adopt a “casual air” with his persona which has been subject to imitation by rival political leaders. A bout of infighting involving the leader of the Liberal Democrat Party, Nick Clegg, and the person rumoured to be leading the coup against him, Vince Cable, was “smoothed over” in a bar with invited media to attend their sipping beer together. This staged event was so contrived that it left everyone watching unconvinced. More recently, the leader of the Labour Party, Ed Miliband sought to promote his credentials as an “ordinary bloke” by inviting media to watch him eat that “cornerstone of a nutritional” English breakfast, a bacon sandwich. The look of disgust as he tried to digest this staple attracted the undisguised glee of all watching. For an example of Mr Farage’s persona, see <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/feb/25/nigel-farage-herman-van-rompuy-damp-rag> when he famously told [Herman Van Rompuy](#), the president of the EU, he had “all the charisma of a damp rag and the appearance of a low-grade bank clerk” in the European parliament.

³ In his leader’s speech at the Labour summer conference, Ed Miliband failed to mention either the deficit or immigration – two important issues for the electorate. The response afterwards by Mr Miliband that “he had forgotten” that part of his speech did not enhance his reputation. The comment by Ed Balls, the Shadow Chancellor (the Opposition’s “Minister of Finance”) that a proposal by him to cut £100 million of child support if Labour was elected to office in 2015 “was the most difficult decision of his political life” also caused bemusement given the current deficit is £ 100 *billion*.

The SDP entered into an electoral alliance, - the SDP-Liberal Alliance, with the then Liberal Party to fight parliamentary elections together. However, by 1988, the SDP had been subsumed into what became the Liberal Democratic Party – currently the member of the present coalition government along with the Conservative Party. What happened and why did this party fail to “break the mould” of British politics? One cause was the nature of the “first-past-the post” electoral system. The 1983 and 1987 General Election results were as follows [4, p222-3]:

	Votes (mln)	Seats	Share of vote	Share of seats
1983				
Conservatives	13.0	397	42.4	61.1
Labour	8.5	209	27.6	32.2
SDP/Lib Alliance	7.8	23	25.4	3.5
1987				
Conservatives	13.8	376	42.2	57.9
Labour	10.0	229	30.8	35.2
SDP/Lib Alliance	7.3	22	22.6	3.4

The table demonstrates the nature of the “first-past-the post” system in the UK whereby in 1983, even though the SDP/Lib Alliance gained 25.4% of the vote and achieved 7.8 million votes, not far from Labour Party’s result of respectively 25.4% share and 8.5 million votes, this translated into a mere 23 seats versus the 209 won by Labour. The SDP/Lib Alliance had polled well but failed to convert votes into seats as Labour concentrated its votes in inner cities and northern towns, as well as in depressed areas. The nature of the system had acted to prevent the duopoly being seriously challenged and served as a “barrier” to insurgent parties, such as the SDP. A failure to achieve a breakthrough in a General Election, as opposed to one-off parliamentary by-elections, in which the SDP noted some marked successes, ultimately led to the SDP “merging” with the Liberal Party.

It is a challenge that UKIP also faces, as the new “insurgent” party seeking to effect its own breakthrough. While by-election successes and achieving second place, as in Heywood and Middleton, may elicit positive media stories, and European election results further add to its allure, the brutal truth is that without a serious concentration of votes in particular regional areas, it is unlikely to achieve the electoral success in terms of seats won in the House of Commons, as suggested by its relatively high poll ratings.

Conclusion

On 20 November, a by election was held in Rochester and Strood. Mark Reckless, like his colleague, Douglas Carswell, had resigned from the Conservative Party in favour of UKIP and thereby triggering the by-election held. By a majority of 2,920 over the Conservative candidate, Reckless won and has thus become the second UKIP member of parliament. The share of the vote of the main parties and the change from the previous 2010 election is worth considering:

	Share of vote	Change (+/-) from 2010
UKIP	42%	+42
Conservative	35	-14
Labour	17	-12
Green	4	
Liberal Democrat	-	-15

The Liberal Democrat gained just 349 votes and lost their deposit – it was their worst election loss in recent history. Voters of both this party (and Labour) appear to have switched their votes to UKIP, whose candidate was a former Conservative.

Labour’s downturn is also striking and its poor performance was compounded by a Shadow Cabinet member being forced to resign over a posting on social media that appeared to mock the blue collar residents of the constituency – a part of the electorate that Labour likely needs to attract if it is to win the 2015 election.

It was however a limited “victory” for UKIP as there are at least four problems that this party needs to overcome going forward:

The Strategic Voter in European elections

As noted, UKIP has achieved considerable success in European elections but has failed to translate this into a meaningful presence in UK General Elections. Such elections are generally accompanied by lower turnouts than general elections: the May 2014 European election saw a turnout out of just 34% in the UK; and benefit minority parties through the proportional representation system.

They also act as a means of venting elector disenchantment with the governing parties as well as allowing those with firm views on Europe ie its opponents, to also register their disapproval. We have seen that UKIP's share of the vote has not so far translated into a major presence in the House of Commons.

Indeed, this raises the possibility that a vote for UKIP may be perceived by voters as nothing more than a "protest vote" or even a "wasted vote" when it comes to a general election. Voters may act *strategically* in registering a vote against established parties or perhaps vote tactically to deny their selected opponent a winning opportunity by voting for the party "best able" to defeat them.

The question arises as to whether the European Union (or "Brussels" in the "eyes" of UK voters) constitutes the most pressing issue faced by the voters. If the Conservatives win the next general election (a very big *if*) then a vote on continuing membership of the European Union is likely to be held. If voters opt for remaining in, then what exactly is UKIP's future role thereafter?

Internal organization

The public face of UKIP is its leader, Nigel Farage, who enjoys wide visibility and is perceived as possessing charisma and the "populist touch" [16]. The issue is whether there is any true "management in depth" beyond this photogenic individual. The last twenty years has witnessed a number of leadership troubles – UKIP lost one of its most charismatic leaders in the early 1990s – Robert Kilroy-Silk, after a botched bid for the party's leadership.

The SDP, noted above, "came to grief" over the role of its then leader, David Owen, appeared to eclipse both its other senior members and the leadership of its alliance party, the Liberals. Infighting saw his eventual departure and a loss of one of its most significant political figures.

Thus, UKIP runs a risk of becoming less a national party, more a "one-man" band. That said, in their otherwise admirable book, Ford and Goodwin do not quite get to grips with the personality of Farage and his persona. Voters clearly see in him a media savvy personality clearly placed to act as a prism through which to vent their displeasure with the existing political elite.

A narrow and unbalanced political message

We have noted that UKIP has been able to tailor a message that links Euroscepticism, hostility to immigration, populist dissatisfaction with established parties and elites, with a pessimistic outlook, to great effect.

However, a question arises as to whether it can move beyond this narrow political message that has been successful so far with its particular electoral base ie aged, uneducated white males.

The focus on Europe without reasoned, costed and detailed policies on education, the National Health Service and the economy (what happens if the UK does exit Europe?) is unlikely to woo that part of the electoral base which do not feel unduly threatened or worried by those across the English Channel.

Geography of support

As noted above, and particularly in the SDP case study, UKIP need to win clusters of districts and county council seats in order to make up for the previous lack of concentration. If we borrow from the US observation¹ that "all politics is local" then UKIP, in order to compensate for its lack of specific national policies, need to build upon local issues that affect the community in which they are seeking representation. It is understood that UKIP have paid close attention to what the Liberal Democrats have achieved in the past – building up a credible presence through participation in local elections and then moving to consolidate this position by aiming for the parliamentary seat.

This will take both time and resources, particularly human. The 2103 council elections were an important step in this direction but UKIP still remains at the early stages of such a move. UKIP faces significant challenges as evidenced by the rise and fall of the SDP in the 1980s by virtue of the "barrier to entry" to the top levels of British politics posed by the "first-past-the-post" system but it has demonstrated that it can "tap into the deep well" of pessimism that afflicts a significant part of the population².

¹ Uttered by Tip O'Neill who was Democrat Speaker of the House during the Reagan presidency.

² Or to borrow from Daniel Bell – the "end of optimism". A long period marked by a decrease in living standards, increased retirement ages, fewer jobs for locals competing with migrants, reduced public services and "no end in sight".

It remains to be seen, in view of the deep seated economic issues faced by the UK over the coming years on the back of declining living standards after six years of austerity, whether the main British parties will be able to neutralize the UKIP message. While UKIP is unlikely to achieve a significant breakthrough in May 2015, it is likely to be well placed to benefit from continued disappointment with the two main political parties and possibly influence which of the main parties holds office.

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