

# Brownshirts in Blazers? The Rise of UKIP

**Martin Sullivan**

**W**ITH ITS 16% of the vote in the June Euro-elections the UK Independence Party, previously dismissed as a group of cranks on the political fringe, displaced the Lib Dems as the third largest party and won 12 seats in the European Parliament – a big advance on the 6.5% and 3 seats it achieved in 1999. UKIP followed this up in September by coming third in the Hartlepool by-election, relegating the Tories to fourth place. The party showed it had the potential to establish itself as a significant force in British politics.

UKIP has its origins in the Anti-Federalist League, which was formed in 1991 by Alan Sked, a London School of Economics professor and ardent Thatcherite, to campaign against the European Community (as it then was) and the Maastricht Treaty in particular. UKIP itself was launched in 1993 but made slow progress. It won only 3% of the vote in the 1994 European elections and subsequently found itself overshadowed by James Goldsmith's Referendum Party, which enjoyed the advantage of being bankrolled by a millionaire.

After Goldsmith's death in 1997 and the disintegration of his party, UKIP's fortunes began to look up. It attracted wealthy backers such as Yorkshire property tycoon Paul Sykes, who contributed over £1 million to the party's 2004 European election campaign, while the media attention generated by the recruitment of former TV personality Robert Kilroy-Silk and actress Joan Collins helped raise the party's profile among the general public. In this year's elections the UKIP campaign team included Dick Morris, Bill Clinton's one-time political strategist, and PR specialist Max Clifford who selflessly gave his services in exchange for a £30,000-a-month salary.

UKIP's ability to conduct a well-financed, effectively publicised campaign would not in itself have been enough, however, to secure such an increase in its vote. What, then, explained the surge in support for UKIP in June? Apart from the fact that it attracted a general protest vote against the main political parties, the obvious answer is that UKIP's euroscepticism struck a chord among a section of the electorate. Certainly, the party's

denunciations of the European Union's bureaucracy and lack of democratic accountability have a broad appeal (even if its MEPs show little compunction about getting their own snouts in the trough at Brussels). Indeed, some on the left have even suggested that UKIP's electoral gains expressed, if in a confused and contradictory form, a healthy popular opposition to the current project of European integration.

But this hardly explains the success of two UKIP candidates in the London Assembly elections, where Europe was not exactly a major issue. Rather, the attraction of UKIP's line on Europe has to be understood in the context of the openly racist propaganda that the party has directed towards white voters. Thus UKIP's campaign against the EU concentrates on the alleged threat posed by immigration from Eastern Europe, tying this into a wider xenophobic attack on migrants, asylum seekers and foreigners in general.

The party's website declares that Britain is "already full up", is in fact "bursting at the seams" due to an influx of foreigners. "Our cities are overcrowded", UKIP asserts, "our roads clogged up and our railways are grinding to a halt. Our doctors' surgeries cannot cope and the hospital waiting lists are growing. New housing estates are covering the countryside. In 2002, the UK government allowed in another 200,000 people. The UK Independence Party will put an end to mass immigration." The cover of UKIP's manifesto features three white babies with the slogan: "Concerned about their future? This is their country, make sure it stays that way."

Of course, UKIP repeatedly and indignantly denies that it is a racist party. But it combines this with an equally fervent denunciation of political correctness, which it claims prevents an honest debate on issues of race and immigration. In practice, this means that UKIP persistently plays the race card while claiming that it is merely exercising freedom of speech. Its website quotes a UKIP member as saying: "I am no racist, but I am prepared to have a discussion about how things like immigration affect our country. I went to a

Christian school where they were not scared to talk about the Empire and colonies and other races. You can't say anything now because people will point their finger and cry 'harassment'."

One of UKIP's most vociferous critics of political correctness was boxing promoter Frank Maloney, the party's candidate in the London mayoral election. After a visit to Tower Hamlets, Maloney posted an article on his campaign website condemning Whitechapel as a ghetto. "Immigrants are not integrating with the rest of British society", he wrote, "but creating their own areas, where the rule of law does not apply and people have no allegiance to Britain whatsoever – and even seek to harm British people." Pointing out that his own family comes from the area, he added: "Now barely anyone speaks English and to look around you would think you are in a different country."

It is understandable therefore that Robert Kilroy-Silk, now one of the party's 12 MEPs, chose to join UKIP after being sacked from his TV job for publishing an article in the *Sunday Express* describing Arabs as "suicide bombers", "limb-amputators" and "women-repressors". This sort of comment has in fact been a regular feature of Kilroy-Silk's *Express* column. Earlier he had written: "The barmy liberals like Diane Abbott don't like the word 'swamped' when used by the Home Secretary to describe schools and GPs' surgeries being overrun by asylum seekers who cannot speak English. What word would they prefer? Overwhelmed? Drowned? Submerged? What is the problem with using proper English words to describe an appalling situation that many British people have to put up with?" And he had a ready explanation for HIV and the rise in TB cases in Britain: "The indigenous population is not responsible. The diseases are being brought here by refugees, immigrants and tourists.... It is the foreigners that we have to focus on."

UKIP's political character is demonstrated not just by its recruits but by its friends in the European Parliament, where it is part of a euro-sceptic alliance which includes the League of Polish Families, a Christian fundamentalist, anti-semitic organisation that attacks the EU as a plot by freemasonry against Christianity. One of its leading figures is historian Ryszard Bender of the Catholic University of Lublin, who has described Auschwitz as "not a death camp, but a labour camp. Jews, Gypsies and others were killed by hard labour, not always that hard and not always killed".

UKIP is not without its own Holocaust deniers. In 2001 the party's then Scottish organiser Alistair McConnell wrote to the press supporting the views of right-wing historian David Irving and criticising the Board of Deputies of British Jews for exercising undue influence over the media on this issue. In an email to another UKIP member, McConnell wrote: "I don't accept that gas chambers were used to execute Jews for the simple

fact there is no direct physical evidence to show that such gas chambers ever existed.... there are no photographs or film of execution gas chambers.... Alleged eyewitness accounts are revealed as false or highly exaggerated." The UKIP leadership publicly defended McConnell's right to free speech and restricted itself to suspending him from the executive for a year.

In light of all this, it is not surprising to find that some of UKIP's leading members have past links with the far right. Two of its MEPs, Mike Nattrass and Jeffrey Titford, were formerly members of the New Britain Party, a pro-Apartheid, pro-White Rhodesia outfit whose leader Dennis Delderfield is on record as arguing that "suburb after suburb and town after town across the land have been taken over by Asians, Africans and Afro-Caribbeans.... In the not too distant future they will have direct control in many areas". Nattrass, who stood as a candidate for Delderfield's party in the 1994 Dudley by-election, has explained his change of political allegiance on the grounds that "UKIP is electable and New Britain isn't".

Another MEP, Nigel Farage, held discussions in 1997 with the British National Party's Mark Deavin, a former student of UKIP founder Alan Sked. Deavin was the author of a document entitled 'The Grand Plan: The Origins of Non-White Immigration', which argued that "the mass immigration of non-Europeans into every White country on earth" had been engineered by "a homogeneous transatlantic political and financial elite to destroy the national identities and create a raceless new world order". The plan was, Deavin wrote, "Jewish in origin". Farage wouldn't have felt entirely out of place in such company. Sked, who left the party in 1997, in part because he believed it was being taken over by "extremists", has recalled an argument with Farage over the inclusion of a statement on the party's membership form opposing discrimination against minorities. "We will never win the nigger vote", Farage told him. "The nig-nogs will never vote for us."

Concerning links with the British National Party, Sked has noted that, despite the UKIP leadership's public condemnation of the BNP, there is in fact "a symbiosis between elements of the parties". Indeed, in the summer of 2003 the UKIP and BNP held negotiations over an electoral agreement under which they would avoid competing for the anti-EU vote in their respective strongholds. While no official agreement was reached, Sked observes that BNP leader Nick Griffin has spoken on the BBC of "an informal pact between his party and elements of the UKIP leadership". Although the fascists have won suburban council seats and Frank Maloney's London mayoral campaign was clearly intended to attract a backward white working class vote, the basic division of labour is, as Deavin explained back in 1997, that "the BNP will be the official opposition in the inner cities, in

working class areas. The UKIP will be the opposition in the shires, the county areas, the middle class opposition”.

Although the parties are political rivals, and the UKIP leadership has in the past expelled BNP entrants, there is an evident overlap between the two organisations. Peter Troy, who headed UKIP's list for the European elections in Scotland, had previously stood down from the same position in the North East amid a row over his recruitment of a BNP activist to UKIP. And the Britain in Europe organisation identified nine candidates standing for the BNP in the European elections who were former UKIP members. In response UKIP's leader, former Tory MP Roger Knapman, insisted that his party had no connection with the BNP and that “we abhor racism”, assertions that caused much mirth on a fascist internet discussion list. “His nose must be a foot long by now”, one post read.

The UKIP's prejudices extend beyond ethnic minorities to gays. In an article in the *New Statesman* describing his experiences in the party, former UKIP member and co-author of its 2001 general election manifesto Aidan Rankin wrote: “Homophobia was one of the few forces uniting a notoriously divided party. To its brownshirt-in-blazer tendency, the dangers of Europe and the dangers of homosexuality were intertwined.” Indeed, Damian Hockney, now one of UKIP's London Assembly members, stood against Michael Portillo in the 1999 Kensington & Chelsea by-election under the slogan “It takes a real man to defend the £”, thus neatly combining anti-gay prejudice with opposition to the euro. During his mayoral campaign Frank Maloney attacked London's Pride festival, declaring that he had “a problem with gay parades. I object to seeing policemen in uniform holding hands in public – it's not a family way of life and we should support the family more”. He followed this up with the remark that he didn't intend to visit the north London borough of Camden because there were “too many gays” there.

Not surprisingly, UKIP is not exactly a fervent

supporter of feminism, either. Godfrey Bloom, UKIP MEP for Yorkshire and the Humber, who was selected to represent his party on the European Parliament's women's rights committee, proceeded to argue that “no self-respecting small businessman with a brain in the right place would ever employ a lady of child-bearing age”, adding that women should get back to the kitchen and learn to “clean behind the fridge”. Even the *Daily Telegraph* commented that Bloom's outburst gave UKIP “a misogynistic image that it will have difficulty shaking off”. The party leadership, however, refused to condemn Bloom's views, claiming that he was merely trying to highlight the cost of maternity pay for small firms.

During the June elections anti-racists rightly concentrated on preventing the BNP from winning seats, but it would be a mistake to underestimate the threat posed by UKIP. In contrast to the BNP, whose fascist origins have proved a heavy electoral liability, UKIP's more “mainstream” racism is capable of winning much wider support. If an extreme right-wing party with a broad popular base is to emerge in Britain, it is likely to take this form.

Whether UKIP can make any further advances in building such a party is debateable, given its tendency to tear itself apart by political infighting, currently demonstrated by Kilroy-Silk's bid for the party leadership and his consequent expulsion from UKIP's European parliamentary group. This came too late to prevent the resignation of Frank Maloney, who complained that the party had been “hijacked by a sun-tanned parasite”. Paul Sykes has left too, in protest at the decision to stand against Tory eurosceptics in the general election, taking his money with him.

One thing is certain, though – UKIP's brand of europhobia has absolutely nothing in common with the left's criticisms of the EU or indeed with any kind of progressive politics whatsoever.

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