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**UKIP Wants “Brexit”**

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The populist UK Independence Party – UKIP – wants Britain’s exit (aka Brexit) from the EU. While UKIP has no members in the House of Commons, it does have three seats in the House of Lords and nine seats in the European Parliament. A May 2013 poll shows the party with a whopping 27% support for the 2014 European elections, ahead of all other parties in the UK.

UKIP has a membership of about **30,000**. According to a YouGov poll in February 2013, 71% of the party’s voters are aged over 50, 57% are male, 87% do not have a college education (54% finished their full time education at age 16 or younger), and 77% make less than £ 40,000 a year.

The current leader, Nigel Farage (49), joined the Conservative party while attending high school at Dulwich College (an independent public school for boys) in South London. Deciding against attending a university, he became a commodities broker instead, working for various companies in the City of London. He left the Conservative Party when John Major signed the Maastricht Treaty, and founded UKIP with Alan Sked and other members of the Anti-Federalist League. In 1999, he was elected MEP for South East England; in 2006, he became the leader of UKIP and, after a short break, was re-elected to that position in 2010. The European Parliament fined him for insulting EU Council President Herman Van Rompuy and refusing to apologize. In his private life, he is in his second marriage and has four children; he enjoys fishing, British pubs, smoking, and country sports.

**UKIP’s Agenda**

UKIP defines itself as a conservative libertarian party. Building upon a rhetoric of disempowerment, the party defines itself as “patriotic”; it seeks to “claw back independent power over (our) national life.” Strong points on the party’s agenda include:

- Corporate tax cuts
- Deficit reduction with £77b public sector cuts
- Immigration freeze for five years; then allowing only those immigrants into the country who can pay a minimum
of five years of housing, private schooling, and private health insurance out of pocket
- Criminalizing visa overstay
- Welfare reform (welfare should be “a safety net for the needy, not a bed for the lazy”)
- Opposition to health tourism
- Social housing reform (prioritizing people whose parents and grandparents were born locally)
- No public funds for renewable energy projects; ban on showing “An Inconvenient Truth” in schools
- Energy sourced from nuclear plants, coal, and shale gas
- Creation of a UK Sovereign Wealth Fund from shale gas revenues, similar to Norway’s Oil Fund
- Strengthening front line policing
- Eliminating the possibility of parole for life sentences
- Withdrawing the UK from the European Court of Human Rights (scrap the European Arrest Warrant, scrap the Human Rights Act)
- Stopping of the HS2 High Speed rail line project (connecting London to Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and potentially Edinburgh and Glasgow)
- Opposition to gay marriage
- Withdrawing the UK from the Common Fisheries Policy (eliminate fishing quotas)
- Free speech (“political correctness is stifling free speech”)

Criticism

Farage is involved in an internal party cleansing crusade, trying to rid UKIP from the “racist” label that critics attach to the party. He withdrew party membership to UKIP’s master of gaffes, Godfrey Bloom. Bloom labeled foreign countries receiving aid as “bongo bongo lands,” and had numerous sexists and misogynist remarks. He was twice carried out of the European Parliament for being too drunk (2008) and for shouting Nazi slogans (2012).

According to the BBC, two thirds of the British Conservatives are eurosceptics. In light of UKIP’s surge in the polls, many Conservatives have adopted parts of the UKIP rhetoric to prevent losing their seats in the next election. They have done it to such an extent, that EU Commission President Barosso reprimanded them: “Increasingly, your party is looking like UKIP ... And I start to have some doubts whether you are going to be elected in Britain ..., because when it comes to (being) against Europe people prefer the original to the copy.”

British home secretary Theresa May (Conservative) was caught off-guard when she repeated almost word-for-word an example quoted by Farage. In his tirades against immigration and the “human rights nonsense,” Farage had told the story of a Peruvian man convicted of manslaughter, whose deportation from the UK was stopped due to the man’s bond with his cat. Fact checkers later proved that the man in question was Bolivian, had not committed any crime other than overstaying his visa, and his deportation was stopped because he was in a domestic partnership with a British woman not a cat (although, yes, there is one in the story, the couple does have a pet cat).

Conclusion

UKIP uses immigrants and the welfare state as scapegoats. The party’s rhetoric has much in common with the American Tea Party, where gut feeling, display of “toughness” and “raw power” are valued. Bloom even trumpeted, “I used to beat up lads like the PM.” UKIP’s push for an exit from the European Union is attractive because it seems like a return to the simpler life on the good old British Isles.

EuroPoint: The problem is not UKIP’s existence, but its popularity, especially with the British Conservatives who should know better.