

Britain, the UK Independence Party and the EU

Written by Alan Sked

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ALAN SKED, FEB 21 2013

In 1991 I founded the Anti-Federalist League which changed its name in 1993 to the UK Independence Party. I remained party leader until 1997 when, for a variety of reasons, I quit. One reason was that the party was becoming too right-wing for my liberal sensitivities. The major one was that I thought Sir James Goldsmith, who had led the Referendum Party in the 1997 election, would be the torch-bearer for British Euro-scepticism in future. However, Sir James died a few months later and his party disappeared. Hence Ukip, soon under the baleful leadership of Nigel Farage, continued to hold the torch. Farage has not been a particularly successful leader—the party has never won a seat in Parliament and has only a tiny handful of councillors. In the House of Lords it has the support of only three very right-wing peers—all Tory defectors— and in opinion polls it registers still only about 9% of the national vote. In two recent by-elections, however, it has beaten the Tories and Liberal Democrats in seats where these parties had no chance of winning anyway. The coalition parties, given the state of the economy, are highly unpopular. The despised Liberal Democrats, however, still manage to beat Ukip in most opinion polls.

What then does this mean? Probably only that, since the Liberal Democrats have entered government, the mindless, protest vote has switched to some extent to Ukip. The anti-foreign, anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant vote, however, is going Ukip's way as well. Under Farage, who has attracted favourable comments in the past from the BNP (see Andrew Pierce's article in the *Times* of 5 June 1999) the party has become obsessed with race and immigration. Its present campaign in the Eastleigh by-election, for example, will, according to Farage be based primarily on immigration. On the BBC's *Question Time* last year Farage insisted that London's housing shortage was due to immigrants arriving on planes and being given flats by councils the very next day. He stuck to his guns on this despite denials by local housing officers in the television audience. At the last general election at a time of the greatest financial crisis the country had faced since the 1930s, the party's flagship policy was to ban the burka. Ukip peers invited the Dutch anti-Islam campaigner, Geert Wilders to the UK to show his film *Fitna*. All sorts of Ukip figures are on record making statements that Islam is irrational, a threat to Western civilization and a retarded ideology. (See the posting of 26 November on HuffPostUK). According to the political scientist, Dr. Robert Ford of Manchester University, whose research is the most extensive yet conducted into Ukip's voters, the latter are more likely than supporters of any other party save the BNP, to have hostile attitudes towards immigrants and ethnic minorities, to agree that the government should repatriate immigrants and favour white job applicants, and to believe that immigrants commit the most crime. They also see Islam as a threat to Western civilization. But their votes do not add to much, as has been already noted. And their official national party membership figures as submitted to the Electoral Commission for 2004 and 2008 were 26,000 and 14,630 respectively. Most Tory constituency parties are bigger! The country is not about to leave the EU on account of Ukip.

The main aim of the party when I founded it was to convert the Conservative Party to a policy of quitting the EU—just as the Anti-Corn Law League in the 1840s had converted Sir Robert Peel to Free Trade. It has taken a while, but in this I have succeeded. The new generation of Tory MPs is solidly Eurosceptic and a majority of the party membership would vote to withdraw from the EU. Cameron's difficulties in the House of Commons reflect this new situation.

This certainly derives in part from political competition from Ukip. Yet Euro-scepticism first entered the party seriously under Thatcher and Major in the battle over the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. Thatcher's political assassination by the Europhiles meant that the issue would always fester. However, the main reason why most British people now reject

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membership of the EU is more straightforward. After forty years of membership they see that the EU is undemocratic, lacks accountability and that its policies don't work. The EU now has about half a dozen presidents—none of them elected. Its head of foreign affairs—Baroness Ashton—has never been elected to anything her entire life. Only 25% of British citizens vote in EU parliamentary elections since the results can't change anything. The Council and the Commission are responsible to no one. Votes and decisions are taken in secret. The end results, moreover, are dreadful. The CFP has denuded the North Sea of fish and destroyed Britain's fishing fleet and fishing communities; the CAP rewards agricultural barons, impoverishes small farmers, keeps prices high for consumers and rewards inefficiency; the Common Foreign and Security Policy is a joke. Most EU member states simply rely on the US for their defence and Britain and France cannot even maintain a campaign against Libya without US logistical and weapons support. Israel rightly treats the EU with contempt given that its foreign aid in the past has found its way into the hands of Palestinian terrorists. Now, to cap everything, EU mismanagement of its own currency zone has made it a threat to the world economy and especially, it seems, to the City of London. Why then would any intelligent British citizen want to remain inside the EU?

Will the UK leave soon? Well, the political establishment is still pro-EU. But no party is positively popular. Cameron's Tories want to ditch the pro-EU Liberal Democrats but cannot hope at present to win an election by themselves. Labour is popular in opposition, but has a bad reputation and poor leadership. So Cameron has taken the initiative to forestall any rise in Ukip in the polls and to unite his party by promising a renegotiation of Britain's role in Europe and to offer a choice in a referendum between whatever results this produces and the option of leaving the EU altogether. If he had not, events regarding fiscal and monetary union inside the EU would make some kind of referendum necessary in any case. So there will be a referendum on the EU, I predict, whether Cameron wins the next election or not. And it will be one on membership, whatever Milliband or Clegg would ideally prefer.

Will Britain vote to leave the EU? The campaign will be tense but yes, I think so. Then France and others will follow her example.

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