

Where do we go from here?

Anthony Scholefield, a founding member of UKIP, argues that electoral success must be followed by rigorous intellectual application and complete candour

The key insight behind the creation of UKIP - I was one of its founders and its Secretary from 1997-2000 - was that political parties only make strategic changes if they lose voters and seats. The reaction so far of the major parties is that 10th June has not hurt sufficiently to make them change. So what does UKIP do now?

The election of 12 UKIP MEPs in one swoop both telescopes the aspirations of UKIP over two or three Euro elections and, at the same time, takes the 'elect an MEP strategy' as far as it can be taken.

Whatever UKIP's strategic priority now it cannot be to add a few more MEPs in five years' time. Its goals will have to be pursued with the MEPs it now has. Paradoxically, success on 10th June increases the pressure on UKIP to act quickly and forcefully - but exactly where and how and when has yet to be settled.

The Party's most important task is to describe how it intends to withdraw from the EU and how, in the wake of its withdrawal, it will establish a new basis for relations with EU states. This will need to involve the wide canvassing of ideas and a strengthening of the party's intellectual base.

Scrupulous care will also be required in dealing with the issue of the Constitution and possible referendum. To try and make a referendum a vote on withdrawal from the EU will automatically risk losing the votes of those who would be against further integration but would also be against leaving the EU. It would mean surrendering the advantages always enjoyed by those defending the status quo - and to lose the referendum would be a quite shattering disaster.

UKIP also faces difficult decisions in relation to its General Election strategy. There are those who wish to repeat the mass charge of 400 plus candidates of 2001 while others advocate a more subtle strategy. This might involve concentrating fire on well-known europhiles or asking

candidates for a withdrawal pledge before determining whether to stand against them. The downside of such an approach is that UKIP must be seen to act forcefully or it will be in danger of fading. My own view is that to attack sympathetic eurosceptics and to fight in hopeless seats would entail a huge diversion of effort and would consequently reduce the Party's impact.

Finally, there is the question of whether UKIP should campaign more intensively on issues such as immigration reform (I note the huge and largely unreported BNP vote), find policies on the Blair government's constitutional mess and whether it really needs to invest a large amount of effort in developing policies across the board.

Exit Strategy

How does UKIP see its exit strategy from the EU? Traditionally it has put forward three possibilities: (1) UKIP wins a Westminster majority (2) one of the major parties converts to a withdrawal policy (3) in exasperation, an incumbent government decides to hold a referendum on British membership. However, it now appears that there may be other possibilities. The new Constitution may lead to enhanced co-operation and the creation of an inner 'core', a situation in which withdrawal proceeds naturally, possibly with other states. There are already those who think that the EU 'core' has already determined that the UK will never be a true aspirant to EU integration and would be prepared for Britain to leave by mutual agreement especially after a constitutional *debacle* in the referendum.

There has been considerable confusion in the UKIP ranks on what those future relations should be. For example, emphasis was put on stopping immigration from the new EU states but, logically, this must imply halting the free movement of labour within the existing EU states. Not so

popular, of course, but honest.

The pathway to withdrawal requires legislative proposals, the repeal of the European Communities Act and a standstill Bill, the European Communities (Temporary Continuance) Bill which would both give political legitimacy to the withdrawal process and signal a start to the immense untangling process. The key points in any future relations must be inter-governmental and any body set up to run trade agreements or other matters must be technical and subordinate. Second, there must be no ratcheting of the integration process.

There are other important realities which UKIP must now face. While trade may indeed be roughly in balance, 60 per cent of British goods exports go to the EU while for the EU core states Britain represents only 13-15 per cent of their market. Second, to obtain a free trade agreement in industrial goods with only major agricultural exporting countries may not be so easy. The central European countries already feel badly let down in their entry negotiations. One aim of the British government is promoting trade with the poor agricultural countries of the world while UKIP is promising a protectionist agricultural regime. It is likely that Britain's EU trade will become less important relatively even if there is an industrial goods free trade agreement - but this is a good thing because it will open up the process of re-orientating Britain's trade to the growth countries of the world.

On all these matters UKIP must be careful to talk straight on the difficulties and benefits of withdrawal. Robert Kilroy-Silk and others have been rather free with their comments on the 'lies' of the europhiles. UKIP must tell the truth even when this is inconvenient.