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Simon Usherwood
Department of Politics
University of Surrey
Guildford, Surrey GU2 7XH
Email: S.Usherwood@surrey.ac.uk

"UKIP's Political Strategy: Opportunistic Idealism in a Fragmented Political Arena"

ABSTRACT

Since the early 1990s, The UK Independence Party (UKIP) has campaigned on a central ideological platform of British withdrawal from the European Union (EU). The negative construction of this core value has resulted in repeated internal divisions within the party, in large part on the best strategy for achieving it. The mutations of UKIP's strategy since its foundation thus reflect both internal tensions as well as shifts in the institutional arenas within which it operates, both at national and EU levels, and the limited resources available to the party. Building on qualitative and quantitative assessments, the paper identifies the central determining factor as being the political opportunity structure, with ideological priorities only affecting choices within the parameters that this structure sets out. The paper posits that UKIP will remain in this situation for the foreseeable future.

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INTRODUCTION

What little academic attention that has been focused on the UK Independence Party (UKIP) has tended to concentrate on the party's ideological profile, an exemplar of Taggart & Szczerbiak's 'hard euroscepticism' (2001). While this has changed in the last few years with the emergence of more considered evaluations of UKIP as a political actor (e.g. Usherwood, 2008; Abedi & Lundberg, 2009; Hayton, 2010), this remains an under-explored field. In this paper the focus is upon addressing this shortcoming, by endeavouring to understand better the interaction between the ideological motivations within the party and the institutional and political structures within which it has to operate. More particularly, it is argued while the party has been able to capitalise to a significant degree within the political opportunity structure within which it operates, this has come at an increasing price to its ideological principles.

A central point of reference for this work derives from Kitschelt's (1986) work on political opportunity structures. Kitschelt describes such structures thus: they "are comprised of specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others" (1986, 58). While the concept has fallen out of use to a certain extent in recent years - not least because of the concept stretching that took place (c.f. Goodwin & Jasper, 1999) – it does still help to guide any analysis of political action, particularly when looking at a relatively peripheral actor, for which institutional constraints might be expected to play more of a role (as Hayton, 2010, also points out).

The paper works from an initial consideration of the potential that political opportunity structures might have to offer, before moving to a brief overview of UKIP's historical development to date. This leads into a discussion of the party's actions within the political opportunity structure in the UK and the potentially divisive position with which the party now finds itself confronted.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES: AN OVERVIEW

Kitschelt's (1986) work in political opportunity structures sought to understand and explain the relative successes and failures of the anti-nuclear movements in four countries, both in terms of mobilisation and impact. His construction of an opportunity structure within each county drew on primarily exogenous factors, relating to the political and party political systems and the degree of 'openness' to new actors and inputs. In so doing, he identified the need to place groups within wider contexts, as well as highlighting the range of possible impacts a group can have: from procedural changes to the channels of participation, through substantive policy impacts, to structural transformations of opportunity structures as a whole.

However, Kitschelt's work was not without critics, not least from those authors who focused more on the endogenous factors within groups (e.g. Tarrow, 1998). As Princen & Kerremans (2008) point out, even if opportunity structures are exogenous in origin, they still need to be recognised at such by groups, framed as opportunities and exploited through the use of the group's resources (also see McAdam *et* al, 1996). Kitschelt had recognised this to a certain extent in his identification of resource types that might be of use – coercive, normative, remunerative and informational – but this was not the main thrust of his work. The cleavage that emerged between these endogenous and exogenous views in the 1990s has persisted, most obviously with the literature on framing that has developed very extensively (see Benford & Snow, 2000, for a useful overview).

However, a second tension also became apparent, affecting both sides of the debate. As Rootes (1999) notes, while Kitschelt had produced a clear and simple model of opportunity structures, it confounded structural and contingent factors, as did Tarrow and others. Indeed, the very success of the idea had led to extensive concept-stretching, to the point that almost anything could be considered part of an opportunity structure under certain conditions. The primary danger in such stretching was to potential render the concept meaningless and untestable, but the increasing focus on contingent factors also risked loosing sight of those elements within the opportunity structure that might condition the actions of all actors.

In more recent years, scholars have moved away for explicit discussions of political opportunity structures, partly for these reasons. However, such work does still take place and has sought to address the problems outlined above. Arzheimer & Carter (2006 and, more in more pointed fashion, 2009)) have recombined endogenous and exogenous factors in looking at far-right party support in Europe, but looking at a mixture of individual-level data and political opportunity structures. These latter are further broken down into long-term

institutional, medium-term party political and short-term contextual dimensions, in order to try and discern their relative weights and impacts. While the findings (2006) did point to some significant relationships, the cases did not allow for a more generalisable set of conclusions about opportunity structures to be drawn.

The present paper has more modest aims that Arzheimer and Carter's work, not least because it does not pursue a comparative approach. However, it does provide a consideration of the impact of political opportunity structures on UKIP and, importantly, suggests that while the exogenous approach is important in understanding the pattern of the party's development, it also requires an appreciation of the endogenous factors, to the extent that these latter can become pivotal to any exploitation of the opportunity structure.

As such, we would characterise the United Kingdom as a relatively closed political system, with a restrictive electoral system for the House of Commons, a small number of parties articulating different demands and a high degree of centralisation. The impact of this system on the expression of anti-EU opinion representation has been discussed at length elsewhere (Usherwood, 2002), the expectation is that in the face of a high hurdle to entry into the Commons, anti-EU groups will look for other, more accessible, arenas to secure a public profile and representation. Moreover, the closed nature of the system will limit substantive impacts on policy, but increase pressure for structural changes in the opportunity structure (Kitschelt, 1986).

UKIP'S HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

As noted in the introduction, scholarly works on the UK Independence Party are in short supply. As a consequence, piecing together the history of the party necessarily falls back on to media reporting and personal recollection of participants. However, it is possible to sketch out the main lines of the party's development. The party's roots are most usefully traced back to Margaret Thatcher's 1988 Bruges speech, which catalysed what had previously been a highly diffuse opposition to the European Community. Most notable in this process of catylization was the establishment of the Bruges Group. Under the leadership of an undergraduate student at the University of Oxford, Patrick Robertson, the Group was able to gather together a wide range of academics, economists and politicians, all of whom subscribed to the ideas laid out in the speech, hence the name. Most prominently, the members included Lord Harris of High Cross, former president of the Institute of Economic Affairs and first chairman of the Group, Professor Kenneth Minogue, a key economic adviser to Thatcher, and Alan Sked, lecturer in international history at the London School of Economics, as well as financial backing from Sir James Goldsmith.

The Bruges Group quickly gained a high profile in political and media circles, thanks largely to its vocal and prominent members and to the large volume of publications. However, by 1991 the tensions within the Group between nationalists and ultra-liberals began to take their toll: the increasingly close alignment with the Conservative party made any criticisms of government policy very difficult and one of the casualties was Alan Sked. A former member of the Liberal Democrats, Sked had been radicalised by his academic study of the European integration process and felt that both pragmatically and ideologically the UK should not be a member of the European Community. His presence within the Bruges Group was tolerated until 1992, when he set up the Anti-Federalist League to contest seats in that year's General Election on the single issue of withdrawal from the European Community, whereupon he was 'kicked out' as an 'embarrassment to the government'.[1]

Sked and the small (c.150) group of followers launched the newly named UK Independence Party in September 1993, with a new constitution, logo and the new aim of contesting European Parliament seats in addition to those in the House of Commons (Farage, 2010). The aim was create pressure on the British government of the day by not taking up any EP seats it

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[1] Sked's words: 'Bruges bruises', *Times*, 16 May 1992.

might win: "there is no case in principle or practice for taking up seats in Strasbourg".[2] With the Commons struggling through the ratification of the Treaty on European Union (see Baker *et al* 1994) and the Conservative party suffering deep and possibly terminal rifts over 'Europe', the aim seemed bold, but not unreasonable, and there is no evidence of any disagreement over this central (indeed, sole) policy platform. UKIP were able to put up 24 candidates for the 1994 EP elections, so entitling them to a Party Election Broadcast, and gaining them some media coverage, primarily from newspapers opposed to further European integration. However, the party's performance was weak, averaging 3.3% in those seats contested (Gardner, 2006, 42)

If the outcome was not the political earthquake originally hoped for, then it was at least sufficient to give the party momentum, driving membership and subscriptions up, so allowing for the development of a number of constituency associations. This organic growth was slow but steady and was generally held to be a virtue in a world of professionalized political parties.[3] However, it was to be a distinct disadvantage when faced with James Goldsmith's Referendum Party, which sought to form a government in order to allow for a popular vote on EU membership. The millions of pounds that Goldsmith had at his disposal contrasted sharply with UKIP's generally straitened circumstances and for all of Sked's comments about not favouring "chequebook politics" (Times 27 June 1996), the 1997 General Election was always going to be difficult.

In the event, Labour's landslide overshadowed anything else, but neither the Referendum Party (2.6% of the total vote, 811,000 votes, 42 saved deposits from 547 candidates) nor UKIP (0.3%, 105,000 votes, 1 saved deposit from 193 candidates (Parliament Research Paper 01-38)) had come anywhere their objectives. However, this was to be the least of the party's worries, as it headed for its first major internal conflict.

Sked, party leader since 1993, always had a rather brusque manner about him and there had been some unhappiness about his leadership and the degree of inclusiveness in decision-making that he had shown ('Sked Missal' Evening Standard, 10 July 1997, talks of a "'cult of

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[2] Sked wrote that if all 87 seats in the Parliament were empty 'then Europe would know that the British people has repudiated Maastricht and that the road to secession was open', leaving the government the options of either renegotiating membership or 'fac[ing] annihilation' in a general election (Sunday Telegraph 24/04/1994, 'Sunday Comment: Dear Tory, don't vote Tory on Europe')

[3] "No new star can rise into the Conservative or Labour firmament until he or she has demonstrated obedience, deference and discretion…Every MP or MEP has demonstrated his or her willingness to bow beneath the party whip" (Daniel, 2005, 26).

personality'"). Matters came to a head in the summer 1997, after an affair involving alleged infiltration by the British National Party (BNP) ('Nick Griffin… The Sting', Searchlight, July 1997, is a useful overview). This became conflated with efforts by other National Executive (NEC) members, including Nigel Farage and Michael Holmes, to work together with the remains of the Referendum Party and the anti-EU movement more generally (Gardner, 2006, 73). Sked then expelled Farage, Holmes and David Lott, the National Organiser for the party, in late May 1997, only to reinstate them one month later, after legal advice had been taken on both sides. The revelation that Sked had used almost all of the party's finances to pay for his legal advice and the very poor showing at the Uxbridge by-election in late July (39 votes) were to be his final undoing, and he announced his resignation from the party in the monthly newsletter in August, followed by several other NEC members.

In the wake of Sked's departure, those opposed to him pushed their cause. Lott wrote to senior party members on behalf of the remaining NEC later in August, stressing the importance of the 1999 EP elections (which were to be fought under a new proportional representation system), the need to work with other organisations and the logic of taking up any seats won in the EP (Gardner 2006, 82). This last point was contentious and causing several more resignations by those who saw it was buying into the EU machinery. Likewise, the reorganisation of local associations into regional ones to fit the new electoral units for the EP elections provoked much debate. However, with the election of a new NEC and a new leader, Michael Holmes, in late 1997, these were to become party policy. By the time of the 1998 National Conference the motion to change policy on sending MEPs to the EP was passed with minimal dissent in the face of a rediscovered purpose within the leadership, including the successful programme of bringing former Referendum Party members into the fold.

The immediate priority was that of contesting the 1999 EP elections, where the introduction by the Labour government of a proportional representation system gave UKIP their first credible opportunity to gain elected seats. Supported primarily by member's contributions and with a focus in the southern half of England (where popular support was strongest), the party mounted a competent campaign structured around the central idea of 'independence' (Gardner 2006, 94-110). Despite interventions by Sked (about the attempted far-right infiltration and the compromised nature of the party), the party secured almost 700,000 votes (7.0% on a turnout of 23%) and 3 MEPs: Michael Holmes, Nigel Farage and Jeffrey Titford (Parliament Research Paper 1999). The poor turnout almost certainly contributed to UKIP's success, although it did underline the generally low level of interest in 'Europe' amongst the electorate.

However, as in 1997, the party was to throw itself into turmoil once more. The aim was to use the MEPs to gain a public platform, expose fraud and mismanagement and report on the EU's activities (against the perceived 'conspiracy of silence' of the British media on the EU (Gardner 2006, 115)): MEPs would only take minimum expenses and give the rest to help fund anti-EU activities in the UK.[4] To this end, the UKIP MEPs joined the new Europe of Democracies & Diversities (EDD) group in the EP, alongside French ruralists, Dutch Calvinists and assorted Danish anti-federalists. Unfortunately, Holmes' maiden speech to the EP (in reply to the new President of the Commission, Romano Prodi) ended with the distinctly pro-integrationist-sounding, "If Mr Prodi and his colleagues wish to remedy Euro-scepticism and Euro-apathy, I am calling for true democracy and for the elected representatives to have much more authority over the programme and policies of this institution [the Commission]." (European Parliament, 1999). This statement, coupled with some other disputes between Holmes and the NEC, resulted in the latter passing a vote of no confidence in September 1999. Holmes agreed to this on condition that the NEC itself stand down at the party conference the following month. This did not happen and the two sides found themselves locked in a legal dispute about each other's power until the following January, when an Emergency General Meeting voted to sack all involved.

The ensuing leadership contest produced a close win for Jeffrey Titford, which in turn led to a small group of members leaving the party to form a new pressure group called Reform UK (Gardner 2006, 141). This was driven by a fear that there was increasing control of the party by far-right elements: Titford had come from the Referendum Party via the anti-immigration New Britain Party, also the former home of another leadership candidate Michael Nattrass (late to become party chair (Daily Mail, 2004)) and during the previous year there had been numerous anonymous emails circulated amongst the membership citing right-wing infiltration (Gardner 2006, 142). Despite this, the rupture appeared to be largely resolved and the party moved towards fighting the 2001 general election. Here the aim was primarily one of raising the party's profile and demonstrating a clear improvement over the 1997 performance, since failure to do so "would mark the end of our ambition of becoming a serious national force" (Gardner 2006, 153). Certainly, the (inconclusive) discussion of pacts with avowedly anti-EU Conservative candidates not to stand against them suggested that the party's profile was stronger than it was. While the manifesto (UKIP 2001) did laid out a general range of

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[4] As one UKIP member put it, "we will take the devil's money and put it to god's work" (quoted in Birmingham Post 10/12/1998, 'Sovereignty comes above all')

policies, these were all essentially a function of the "Independence Dividend" that would accrue for withdrawal from the EU.

In the end, the performance was unimpressive, in that the party only got 390,000 votes, a long way of the 1 million that had been unofficially aimed for (Parliament Research Paper 2001b). In part, this was the result of the European Union not being a major part of the political debate by the other parties, due to some extent to the Conservatives' internal divisions and Labour's *de facto* policy of parking Euro membership. What was more positive was the ability of the party to avoid any internal conflict over the poor showing and was able to start planning for the 2004 EP elections in a positive atmosphere. This was reflected in the peaceful transition of the leadership from Titford to Roger Knapman in mid-2002, after the former felt he had achieved his goal of healing some of the wounds in the party (Gardner 2006, 169). Even the legal dispute with Michael Holmes over his retention of his seat in the EP (which he eventually had to return to the party) did not upset matters too much.

From 2002 onwards, the party concentrated on preparing the ground for the 2004 EP elections. Alongside this, some other decisions of note were taken. Firstly, the party began to contest local elections, on the basis that this was how the Liberal Democrats and Green had built up their support base (Gardner 2006, 175). Secondly, the party began to invest more efforts in developing policy beyond EU withdrawal. This manifested itself in the development of an immigration and asylum policy modelling in part on ideas of Pym Fortuyn in the Netherlands. This broadening of UKIP's activities was not without difficulty. Most notably, one NEC member, Damian Hockney (later to be UKIP's London mayoral candidate) invested much time into fighting what he perceived to be a shift in the core policy of the party: in 2003, election leaflets were drawn up with the slogan "No to European Union", which seemed to imply something different to the "No to the European Union" that had been used before (Ukipuncovered 2004). Hockney claimed that this was driven by the party leadership in response to (unpublished) polling data. Certainly, the involvement from 2003 of Dick Morris (Bill Clinton's former campaign manager) saw the pursuit of a strategy for the 2004 elections of making "UKIP and "no" synonymous" (Gardner 2006, 174), a much broader and ambiguous platform than simply withdrawal.

If Morris' involvement (resulting from a chance meeting on a cruise with Roger Knapman) was useful, then it was made all the more forceful by the engagement of two other individuals. First, publicist Max Clifford, a eurosceptic Labour supporter, was contracted for six months to help manage the party's media image. Secondly, and ultimately more consequentially, Robert Kilroy-Silk joined the party in April 2004. Kilroy-Silk had been a

Labour MP in the 1970s and 1980s, before tensions with the Militant Tendency led to him stepping down, and pursing a new career as a daytime television chatshow presenter. This had come to an abrupt end in early 2004 after an article attacked Arabs (Kilroy-Silk 2004). His recruitment to UKIP provoked massive media interest and he was quickly placed at the top of the party list for the Midlands, mixing UKIP policy with his general political message of distrust in "metropolitan, political-correct elites" (Gardner 2006, 189). The subsequent snowballing of the campaign was apparent in the increased demand for UKIP representatives in the national media (helped by Clifford's contacts) and the massive investment the party poured into campaigning (funded in large part by key individuals such as Paul Sykes and Alan Brown).

The end result was a very strong showing by the party. With 2.66 million votes (16.2% on a raised turnout of 38.5%), UKIP pushed the Liberal Democrats into fourth place nationally. 12 MEPs were elected from 8 of the 11 electoral regions (not Wales, Scotland or the North East). In addition, the party had won two seats to the London Assembly. By any measure, there seemed to little more that could have been done and Morris' strategy of 'going from broke' had appeared to have paid off. However, the seeds of the next round of internal dissent had already been sown.

In the last few days of the campaign, Kilroy-Silk had not denied reports that he wanted to become party leader after the election (Gardner 2006, 218). After a strong showing in the Hartlepool by-election (10.2% of the vote, putting UKIP third) just before the October annual conference, there was a feeling in the party that its time had come and Kilroy-Silk once again pushed his candidacy for the leadership. At the conference he spoke of wanting to "kill the Tories" (BBC 2004), helping to defeat a motion to not contest seats where the sitting MP had declared their desire to withdraw from the EU (Gardner 2006, 239-240). Kilroy-Silk claimed that he was getting many calls from the membership to take up the leadership, but meetings with the NEC and the MEPs failed to produce a clear resolution, so instead he withdrew himself from the UKIP whip in the EP and tried to call an Emergency General Meeting to pass a motion of no confidence in Knapman and so cause a leadership election (Gardner 2006, 247-261). In this, he was to be unsuccessful, with only a minority of local branches willing to support him and his calls to capitalise on the success of the elections: Kilroy-Silk resigned from the party in January 2005, setting up a new party, Veritas.

The 2005 general election went as well as could be expected in the circumstances – the party was not able to devote the same level of resources to campaigning, nor did it have the same personalities to draw media interest. Despite this, the party came fourth nationally, with

606,000 votes (2.2%), with 38 saved deposits (out of 496) (Parliament 2005). The manifesto again tried to stress the breadth of UKIP's policies under what Gardner (2006, 271) terms "liberalism", but which could just as well be considered populism, for their lack of overarching ideological coherence.

Even with the resolution of the Kilroy-Silk episode and the reasonable showing in the general election, the party continued to be rather unsteady. In particular, the party's MEPs had been a continual source of problems since 1999, quite apart from the removals of Holmes and Kilroy-Silk. UKIP MEPs have had consistently poor attendance at the European Parliament (Gardner 2006, 155), seemingly at odds with the objective of being inside the EU in order to report back to the public. The new intake of MEPs in 2004 had also been marred by sexist comments made by Godfrey Bloom, who had been appointed as a substitute to the EP's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, and by the expulsion of Ashley Mote over non-disclosure of being charged with housing benefit fraud (BBC 2004b). The MEPs' status also seemed to be creating a new centre of power within the party, and in late 2005, the party chair, Petrina Holdsworth, resigned in protest at the over-concentration of resources on supporting their activities (Sunday Telegraph 9 October 2005). Knapman picked up the role until he stood down as leader in mid-2006, his term in office being over. Nigel Farage, who had been for so long seen as a king-maker within the party, was elected as his replacement in September 2006 (BBC 2006).

Farage's programme was one of attempting to mainstream the party. To this end, he was able finally to gain UKIP representation in Parliament with the defection of Lords Pearson and Willoughby de Broke from the Conservatives in early 2007 (Independent, 11 January 2007), as well as becoming a regular media commentator (Farage, 2010). However, problems still remained, not least with a crisis in funding in early 2007, after the Electoral Commission forced UKIP to return over £360,000 to Alan Brown (who had been a major financial supporter for many years), which was eventually overturned by the Supreme Court in 2010 (BBC, 2010). Despite this, UKIP was able to repeat its success in the European Parliament elections in 2009, coming second in number of votes to the Conservatives (just short of 2.5 million) and joint second in number of MEPs (13) with Labour (Hayton, 2010).

However, Farage never appeared to be completely comfortable with the position of party leader and in the wake of the European elections, he announced his intention to step down and concentrate on his role as leader of the European of Freedom and Democracy group in the EP and on contesting the seat of the Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow (Farage, 2010). Combined with the not-entirely coincidental release of his autobiography (Farage,

2010), Farage's gambit was to further position himself and the party in the mainstream of British political debate. However, this was not to happen. Farage's replacement as leader, Lord Pearson, made a much less positive impression on the media, while Farage himself never completely shook off the image of not taking matters too seriously: witness his electoral ploy of visiting every pub in Bercow's constituency (Telegraph, 2010). The outcome of the General Election saw 920,000 votes, fourth again on the national level, and only 100 saved ballots (Parliament Research Paper, 2010).

UKIP'S SUCCESSES WITHIN THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

As the overview of UKIP's development has shown, it is possible to see how the party has been able to exploit the opportunity structure with which it has been confronted. At the same time, it is also apparent that there are an increasing number of limitations. In this section, we will consider both of these.

Most significantly, the opportunity structure created by the various electoral systems at play in the UK has been exploited to the full by the party. From its very foundation, UKIP's leadership recognised that aiming for House of Commons representation (and ultimately control of a majority) was small enough to be negligible: a rare instance of Sked demonstrating a more pragmatic understanding of what his party could do. Hence the focus was always on the European Parliament, which even with its original first-past-the-post electoral system pre-1999 was held to be less important by national parties and in which protest votes carried more weight, as per the second-order model (Rief & Schmidt, 1980). With the introduction of the party list system in 1999, that potential for representation could be taken much further, not least given the unwillingness of Labour and the Conservatives to make much of an issue of European integration at all in subsequent elections (e.g. Rallings & Thrasher, 2005). Thus UKIP has been able to reach a point of confirming its structural role in the British EP party political system following its strong showing in 2009 (Hayton, 2010).

The party has also expanded into seeking representation at the sub-national level, in local councils, particularly in the South-West. Again, this fits with the expectations of the political opportunity structure model, in as much as these are also second-order elections where relatively small mobilisations of voters can achieve the desired effect. This comes even without a strongly defined ideological agenda for local government or its policy competences (c.f. UKIP, 2010): here once again, it is the protest vote that is being drawn upon, especially in light of Farage's attempts to broaden the notion of 'independence' beyond the EU.

Consequently, UKIP has emerged as the strongest and most durable of the very large number of organisations that make up the British anti-EU movement that has developed since the early 1990s. Of the 24 significant anti-EU groups that were founded between 1989 and 2000 (Usherwood, 2004), only the short-lived Referendum Party and its successor, the Democracy Movement can claim memberships of the same order as UKIP: the former was almost completely dependant on the finances and leadership of James Goldsmith, the latter has more a contact list than an active pressure group. From its close connection in time and personnel with many of the other key figures in the movement, UKIP has long played a somewhat

ambivalent role of vehicle for conventional political profile and influence, while also been seen as an organisation that risked overshadowing the other groups and their distinctive positions. The prominent anti-Euro campaigning of the late 1990s was a case in point, where the No campaign kept UKIP at arm's length, for fear of party-politicising the issue, despite the deeply party political nature of the debate (Usherwood, 2004).

However, despite these tensions within the anti-EU movement, and its own internal ruptures, UKIP has been able to progressively expand its formal membership and diversify its funding base. In part, this has been helped by the channelling of funds from the party's MEPs to help with administrative and campaigning costs, although this never quite lived up to the volumes that were initially expected in 1999, given the EP's own accounting restrictions. But the progressive acceptance of UKIP as a political party in the UK, particularly in the public debates on European policy, have clearly opened the doors to more moderate members and supporters: this was demonstrated with Kilroy's brief time with the party, where his rhetorical urge to 'kill' the Conservatives frightening off at least one major donor (BBC 2004). Nonetheless, despite this improvement in resourcing, the party does still operate on a rather parlous budget, hence its determination in overturning in the Supreme Court the Electoral Commission's ruling on returning £368,000 from Brown, a sum equivalent to approximately one-quarter of the party's annual funding (BBC, 2010).

Taken as a whole, the party has found a place in the political system, based primarily on its legitimacy derived from its showings in the EP elections of the past 15 years. This has translated into a small, but noticeable media profile (mainly through the figure of Farage, a man always able to give good copy) and into a growing number of votes in General Elections (Parliament Research Paper, 2010). If the votes have not left the party anywhere near securing an MP by election, then the media profile has been more of a success, particularly given the unwillingness of the main parties to express any outright hostility to the European Union as a whole.

If UKIP has been able to make much of its position, then it is also apparent that this has not been without limitations. At the level of the electoral system, the party has failed to secure a geographical base from which they might secure representation in the Commons. This is evident in two key cases. Firstly, the party's traditional strength in the South-West, driven by fishermen, farmers and senior citizens, has not been focused enough: only one candidate managed to make the third place in their constituency, in Torridge & West Devon (Parliament Research Paper, 2010). Secondly, even where a very tightly focused campaign can be fought, this has not paid much dividend. In 2010, the Speaker of the Commons, John Bercow, came

under much scrutiny and opprobrium for his part in the expenses scandal. With his seat (Buckingham) traditionally not being contested by other parties, this presented an excellent opportunity for UKIP to present itself as an anti-system alternative (in line with Abedi & Lundberg's 2009 model: Telegraph, 2010). However, in a field that quickly became swamped with independents, Farage was still only able to make third place with 17.4%, behind Bercow and the Buckinghamshire Campaign for Democracy (Parliament Research Paper, 2010).

Moreover, the political debate in the UK has also moved on. During the 1990s and 2000s, 'Europe' ranked high as an issue for many people, reflecting the importance accorded to the various treaty revisions and the discussions about Euro membership. However, that interest has fallen sharply, with fewer than 10% of people rating it 'an important issue' since 2005 (Ipsos-Mori, nd). By contrast, the economy gets at least 50% and even immigration hovers around 30%. One could argue that the recession of 2007-9 actually worked against UKIP, by exposing the weakness of European regulation of economic activity, and underlining the continued dominance of national governments in managing financial and economic affairs, so challenging the notion of 'Brussels' as an all-pervasive controller. Certainly, the structure of political debate does not lend itself as conveniently as it did in the 1990s to a single-issue anti-EU party.

Finally, we might also look to the continuing problems relating to UKIP's organizational structure (c.f. Adebi & Lundberg, 2009). While the days of chaotic and schismatic leadership struggles appear to have been left behind, the party still lacks depth of personnel to maintain its operation. Importantly, Nigel Farage, who has been a long-standing pillar of the party, moved on from the position of party leader as quickly as he could, ostensibly to fight the Buckingham seat in the General Election, but also clearly because the responsibility of leading the party disagreed with him (c.f. Farage, 2010). Lord Pearson, his successor, has made a much less positive impression, his standing as a member of the House of Lords notwithstanding (e.g. Times, 2010). This reflects a continuing issue of attracting more 'novice ideologues' than those with professional political skills (Abedi & Lundberg, 2009), which in turn makes it difficult to modernise and optimise the organisational side of the party.

To pull these elements together, while there has been a space within the political opportunity structure for UKIP to grow and develop, this has come at an increasing cost to the party. This cost can be characterised both as an increasing demand on its organisational structures and as a challenge to its ideological focus. These tensions combine to push the party into ever more pragmatic engagements with the opportunity structure.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: TOWARDS PRAGMATISM

The trend towards a more pragmatic politics within UKIP is evident on several fronts. Most noticeable has been the progressive shift in its rhetoric on the European Union itself. This shift has been examined elsewhere (Usherwood, 2008), but it in essence there has been a development from the initial visceral nature of euroscepticism into something wider and more diffuse. This development can be seen as a progression from principled non-engagement (under Sked's leadership), to pragmatic engagement (under Holmes and Titford), to developing new policy lines and arenas of activity (under Knapman), to recontextualising the entire opposition to the EU in a wide-ranging notion of 'Independence' (under Farage and Pearson). As much as the party has pursued a line of withdrawal since its foundation, it has been prepared to buy into a system that gives it some legitimacy through its MEPs, as well as funding. Without doubt, this shift has been in part due to the intrinsic ambiguity of UKIP's 'ideology': built as it is around a negative, the party has always struggled to agree even on the reasons for its opposition, let alone the solutions beyond withdrawal.

However, it is also apparent that the shifting rhetoric has also allowed the party to negotiate and maximise its appeal to voters, not least in opening up new policy areas to its attention: a classic problem for single-issue parties. Bearing in mind the changing profile of popular interests – and more particularly the decline in interest on European integration and the rise of immigration during the 2000s – the development of new strands of political discourse and action gave the party more flexibility than would have been possible under the initial set-up. However, it also has to be recognised that by moving more clearly into the debate on immigration, UKIP continued to expose itself to the problems it has long faced of entryism on the part of the far-right. This exposure is brought up at every available occasion – particularly around elections – both by other parties and by disillusioned former members (e.g. Telegraph, 2007). While the party has been able to resist any significant penetration, the fact that such efforts still persist in being made demonstrates the perceived contingency of UKIP's position and the weakness of its internal organisation in forestalling them.

There is a second dimension to this diversification of UKIP's interests. A key frame in the party's discourse has always been one of being an anti-system actor. However, that frame does not appear to have paid off, at least within the first-order arena of Westminster. Even when presented with a political scandal that tarred all the major parties and raised very significant debate about the shortcomings of Parliament, UKIP was unable to make a clear advance on its performance in the 2010 General Election. The case of Farage in Buckingham has already been mentioned, but across the rest of the country any advance was incremental,

rather than revolutionary. It would be argued that this was in part due to a perception of UKIP as a party that did not have the necessary credibility to enter into office.

Pragmatism is evident in other areas too. In a very limited sense, there has been some socialisation of MEPs into the European Parliament. As Brack has shown (2010), while some of UKIP's MEPs avoid the Parliament as much as possible, others have conceived of their role as one of representation, even if that representation is primarily about rejecting the authority of the Parliament. Likewise, they have become much cannier about using the Parliament's rules of procedure to maximise both funding (by forming a political group) and speaking time (both by maximising the number of MEPs in the group and by leading it) in order to further their objectives.

In the meantime, UKIP has also persisted in its attempts to break into the Westminster arena. Whether through its efforts to pick up representatives in the two Houses from the disaffected or to-be-deselected, or through its repeated proposals for 'electoral pacts' to not contest seats where avowed eurosceptics from one of the major parties were standing (Telegraph, 2010b), the intent has been the same: to make UKIP part of the mainstream. And it is for precisely that reason that the attempted pacts have been rebuffed, for fear of giving additional credibility to the party: in politics, it is much worse to be ignored than to be feared.

Ultimately, UKIP finds itself in a bind. On the one hand, it could stick to its core ideology, but at the risk of losing out on the pragmatic possibilities offered by expanding its key messages outside of euroscepticism. The additional danger here is that scepticism lacks a coherent ideological background and appears to be an ever more marginal concern for most voters. On the other hand, the party could continue to attempt to make the most of the political opportunity structure and adapt itself to push through into a new stage of political profile and impact. While this has the dominant approach of the past few years, it does come at a price, namely that in the absence of a positive ideological or programmatic world-view, the party is in danger of losing the very qualities that have secured its successes to date. In particular, as Abedi & Lundberg (2009) have noted, if we do treat UKIP as an anti-political establishment party, then the structural difficulties in engineering a step-change in British politics means that a longer-term approach of gradual normalisation and legitimisation put that anti-system identity in question. Certainly, for a party that wears the abuse of its detractors as a badge of honour (the 'Cranks and Gadflies of Daniels, 2005, comes from former Conservative leader Michael Howard) that will be a very difficult problem to address.

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