

Time for UKIP to put on a tin hat

By Graham Eardley, Chairman of UKIP Walsall

The 16th president of United States was attributed to have said: “You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.” *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1865 (attributed)*

Given what’s happened in the European Parliamentary elections within the United Kingdom which took place on the 23 May 2019 and using Lincoln’s alleged truism you may say that the results of the election could be likened to a case of most of the people getting fooled by the Brexit Party (BXP). Quite how long they will keep getting fooled for remains to be seen.

As a UKIP candidate for the West Midlands in the European Parliamentary elections, I attended the West Midlands count at the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Birmingham on the 26th of May 2019. There I met a number of former UKIP members who had switched their allegiance to the BXP also some former Conservative members who’d become BXP “subscribers.” Although section 4 of the BXP’s constitution that it placed with the Electoral Commission does mention members and not subscribers which is stated on their website. Whilst they all remained pretty upbeat and understandably so, they did have niggles about how their candidates were selected – in particular the fact that none of them came from the West Midlands.

Also it remained a point of interest what the people who had paid their £25 to the BXP thought of themselves as subscribers and not of members which as time passes could well prove to be a bone of contention between the Board and the BXP’s “membership”.

I read online that a number of Conservatives are holding dual memberships between the Conservatives and the BXP as they are under the deception that as a subscriber that they’re not a member and would not be at all surprised if this attitude effects a few members in my own party as well.

On an individual level I would argue that people who do this are being disingenuous to both parties: you should be either one thing or the other and should someone point this out to their local Conservative Association I'm sure that they would take action as they did in that case of Anne Widdicombe; now BXP MEP for the South West of England. And as Chairman of a UKIP branch I know a similar action will be taken should such people be outed.

Although the Conservative Party and UK Independence Party were not the only parties to have problems with member discipline following the European parliamentary election.

Alistair Campbell Tony Blair's former director of communications has also been disciplined by the Labour Party for saying that he voted Liberal Democrat in the election and as being auto excluded by them.

The Labour Party I will say faces a more difficult decision than other parties because they are currently not clear on whether or not they're a party of leaving or [remaining in](#) the European Union. Jeremy Corbyn was, it is claimed, a reluctant remainer in the 2016 referendum whereas the vast majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party were in favour of remaining in the EU with little to no reluctance.

I would not be at all surprised to see the Labour party strengthen its pro-EU credentials and call for a second referendum even risking losing it further members of Parliament in the north of England and also in Wales.

The Labour Party cannot currently compete with the Brexit Party and to a lesser extent UKIP on the leave side of the debate and so will be forced to maximise its chances with People who voted remain or risk giving further grounding away to the Liberal Democrats who also performed well at the European elections.

I have not really mentioned the Conservative Party in this blog that is because they are currently undergoing a Leadership process which will take until July to complete and it's such a crowded field of contenders I have no real idea as to which path the Tories will take other than it would be fair to say after these elections the chances of a WTO no Deal is now firmly back on the table. Some commentators

have said that such a deal will not pass the House of Commons alone in the Lords.

However, no deal with the European Union still remains the default position as the clock now ticks down to 31 October 2019. The European Union have indicated that they will not budge on the withdrawal agreement. So it remains to be seen who the Conservatives choose as to what a direction where party and the country takes.

Also the result of the Peterborough by-election will have undoubtedly have the effect of concentrating the minds of Conservative Party members as to whom they should choose.

I come now to address the thorny issue of what happens to the party of which I am a member of: UKIP. Thankfully a lot of the coverage Parliamentary elections concentrated on the situation for the two main parties, not yet another squeeze on the UKIP vote to the BXP. This is something which I am also fearful of at the Peterborough by-election, although for the record I would encourage anybody reading this within the constituency of Peterborough to still vote UKIP.

Finally, I will address questions which continue to dog UKIP.

Although I have empathy with the case of Stephen Yaxley-Lennon a.k.a Tommy Robinson, I think now is the time for UKIP to distance itself from him, bearing in mind he did stand against UKIP in the north-west of England constituency. I think it is fair to say UKIP suffered because of what was perceived as full support for his cause, although he was never a member of UKIP and should never be.

As for Carl Benjamin, I would hope that he stays with UKIP and that UKIP is seen as the party of free speech and stands against political correctness, which is what Carl has been championing, as well as the party of Brexit and that the police investigation into Carl Benjamin's comments does conclude that they were a joke in bad taste and don't bring forth any charges.

In the short-term I would say that UKIP needs to put on a tin hat and watch what happens.

As for the medium term (and by that I would say in 6 months) I think the Brexit Party could implode, due to questions over their funding and tensions between “members” and the Brexit Party board. Another area to keep an eye on would be over candidates and how much say BXP members get in their selection. Not to mention what policies to pursue in a whole range of areas.

Something that was a bone of contention when Nigel Farage was at UKIP, was his relationship with the national executive committee, which was independently elected. Whether or not such tensions between the BXP board and its leader might be one for the longer term though.

For example, tensions have already begun to have emerge within the European Parliament between Nigel Farage’s reluctance to work with other Eurosceptic groups including Marie LePenn and her National Rally Party over the leadership of a European Parliamentary group.

If and when such incidents happen UKIP must be ready to capitalise on these in order to regain ground.

Fellow UKIP members should also remember that come what may, the 31st. October 2019 isn’t really that far away and hopefully all BXP MEPs will be gone.

Happy Halloween everyone.

Disclaimer: This blog is written in a personal capacity and does not necessarily reflect the views of Centre for Brexit Studies and Birmingham City University.