

Robert Kilroy-Silk writes...on The Broken Promises of UKIP Leaders

Note: This article was first published in the Sunday Express on 31 October 2004

Immediately after UKIP's stunning election victories in the European elections in June, I suggested a meeting of the party leaders so that we could build on our success and develop our future strategy. The leader of the party, the parliamentary leader, the two main financial backers and Jan and myself met in London's Goring Hotel on Monday June 13th - just days after the results had been announced. We agreed that we needed to establish a London headquarters, assemble a research team, develop policies, draw up the manifesto for the General Election, appoint spokespersons, and plan a series of political initiatives throughout the summer leading to the October Party Conference which, I anticipated, would unveil the manifesto. Nothing happened. Weeks passed, nothing happened. Several times I told the party leadership that we were losing the political initiative that we had gained in June. We should, I repeatedly stressed, be exploiting the obvious panic we had occasioned in the Conservative Party and the alarm felt by the Prime Minister about his beloved project to create a super-state called Europe being wrecked.

Nothing happened. The leadership of the party went AWOL for three long summer months. We wasted precious time. We threw away our advantage. It was unforgivable, criminal. The British people had placed their trust in us and we were letting them down. So, what was I to do? Say nothing? Cover it all up? Pretend that we were politically active and had new policies? Say that everything was fine? This was not possible. It was not possible because I was constantly being asked to act as the party's spokesman on live TV and radio programmes, in this country and abroad, where I was inevitably asked what UKIP's policies were apart from withdrawal from the EU. "What are your party's policies on health?", I was asked on Sky News. "What is in your party's manifesto on immigration and asylum"?, others enquired. Was I to lie? Make them up? Well the latter, actually, was what the leader once suggested I did when I pointed out that he did not have a particular policy. Telling lies was not an option. Throughout the election campaign I had contrasted the lies, the deceit, and the spin which characterized the old political parties in Westminster with our approach. We were honest, open, talked straight.

I could not now engage in a fraud on the electors by asking them to support an invisible and absent leadership, a party without policies or direction, a party going nowhere. That would not have been right. It was not what I was elected to do. It was not what I was about. I was not prepared to deceive either the good members of UKIP or the British people. They had a right to know the truth. They deserved to be given the facts. So, after what had now become *four wasted months*, I made public my view that it would be necessary for there to be a change of leadership of the party if it was to progress.

I suggested that we should have an open and even robust debate about the future of the party in my speech to the party's conference in October - where incidentally we looked back 'in celebration', not forward with new ideas. In a letter to the members I asked: Do you want UKIP to be a serious political party that can dominate political debate, or do we want to remain a pressure group? Do we want the leadership to be democratically elected and publicly accountable, or are we content to continue to be governed by a self-selecting cabal? Do we want a party in which conference decisions - like not making shoddy election deals with the old parties - are respected

and implemented, or are we happy for that to be dismissed, or as it was by the parliamentary leader, made by members 'drunk on euphoria' and subject to review'

These, and the other seven questions I posed, were regarded by an obviously inexperienced and insecure leadership as amounting to a disciplinary offence. I was informed, through the media, that the parliamentary whip would be withdrawn from me - though they were also farcically reported as saying that I would be disciplined for, amongst other things, 'erratic behaviour', upsetting Joan Collins for not attending her book launch, and starting a new political party. All were untrue. It was also alleged - always, by the way, by an anonymous spokesperson - that I was not a 'team player', would not 'toe the line' and attracted 'negative publicity'!

But there was not a team to play in, there was no line to toe, and the publicity we were attracting was increasing our profile and the number of members. Moreover, it was strange, to say the least, to be told by the leader of the party that I was not a team player. This was the same man who had pleaded with me to stand in the Hartlepool by-election. I said it was 'the leader's job'. He said it 'was too far to go' from Devon! It was the same man who, in turn, asked me to be the party's' spokesperson, front man, deputy leader, and then - only last week - to have total control of the general election campaign. I ask you, what kind of leader is it who would give up total control of a General Election campaign while he stays in deepest Devon? This is not leadership, it is abdication of leadership.

But back to the attempt to withdraw the whip from me. They did not do it because they could not. The leader, and the man who actually runs the party - the parliamentary leader - discovered last Wednesday in Strasbourg that only two of their fellow MEPs would support them. They had also, of course, completely ignored or cavalierly disregarded that if someone is alleged to have broken a rule, there first had to be rules. There are none. There also has to be a proper procedure for dealing with alleged offences. There is none. A properly constituted independent tribunal and a right of appeal has to be in place. They were not. This was amateur politics. The 'leader' was invisible as a leader and incompetent as a whip. We would, in the absence of due process and any attempt to adhere to the rules of natural justice, let alone the Human Rights Act, have been in the courts for years. They were in a hole. I helped them out of it. They had made it clear that they did not wish to work with me. Obviously I would not therefore wish to work with them. I resigned the whip.

To be honest it was a great relief. It means that I do not have to publicly defend them when the leader and the parliamentary leader childishly tear up their ballot papers on their first day in parliament. It means that I do not have to attempt to explain away the deputy leader's claim that we will have to fight our way out of the E.U. in the same way that the Chechens attempted to fight their way out of the Soviet Union, just days after the massacre at the Beslan school. More important I will not continue to be embarrassed by being associated in the parliamentary group with parties from Poland and elsewhere that are alleged to be anti-semitic, homophobic, anti-feminist and, by many, as racist. It is of course sad for the good hard-working members of the party that we should have a public row. They must be grown up about this. They have a right to know the truth. And the truth is that they are being let down by their leadership - and only the members have the power to change things.

The future of the party is, as it should be, in their hands. The members have to decide: do they want to remain a fringe group or become a serious political party? Do they want a party that is democratic, open and transparent - or one run by one man as his plaything? Do they want to win? As I said in my conference speech, the British people are disenchanted with the old political parties. They are fed up of being

lied to, talked down to and not listened to. They want a party that talks straight, tells the truth, and will fearlessly stand up for Britain and the British way of life.

This could have been UKIP. It could have seized the opportunity. But you cannot do it by going missing for a whole third of the year. The chance will not come again. Take it now and we could change the face of British politics for ever. Do nothing and we shall regret it for the rest of our political lives.