

## Rise of the mavericks - how Britain differs from Queensland

*London Report 5 from TJ Ryan Foundation Executive Director Professor Roger Scott, 1 May 2014*

The Australian press is full of the success of Clive Palmer and his Palmer United Party (PUP). The British press is suddenly concerned, as are the two major parties, with the sudden leap in support for the United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP). In the current campaign for electing members of the European Parliament UKIP is outpolling both the Labour Party (narrowly) and the Conservatives (significantly).

This is identified in part as the sort of populism manifest in Palmer's PUP as a result of distaste for conventional politics and the appeal of a quirky but nevertheless charismatic leader. But there are major differences which place UKIP closer to Hansen's One Nation in its electoral appeal. The first is the mingling of race and immigration issues with the anti-Europeanism which is the central plank of UKIP.

As the *Guardian* put it (Tuesday April 29):

*"To older fears about loss of sovereignty, mass migration and (more recently) the rise of Islam have been added an equally potent anger about austerity, unemployment and inequality - a cocktail that means Euroscepticism is alive across the whole political spectrum."*

This is worrying both the major parties, as evidenced by a cross-party campaign to brand UKIP as racist. But it is a peculiarly British definition of racism in a society which has now largely embraced the presence of post-imperial immigrants who add such a variety of colours and dress to the local scene, especially here in Brixton.

As a Labour former Minister explained:

*"UKIP's campaign needs to be exposed for what it is, a racist campaign. The party is practising what is in effect a form of Euracism. They are deploying the same language and tactics used by openly racist parties like the (crypto-fascist) British National Party, but instead of targeting migrants from Africa and Asia, they are targeting migrants from within the European Union."*

Nigel Farage, the UKIP leader, has frequently had to apologise for various extremist statements from his party faithful, for example advising comedian and latterly serious actor Lenny Henry to emigrate to "a black country". But the appeal of an anti-European migration platform has led other mainstream leaders to worry about branding a third of the country (telling pollsters they support this UKIP policy) as bigots and racists. Shades of Western Sydney. These are the 'battlers' Conservatives won last time around and now face losing. There is an uneven distribution of support for UKIP, strongest in England (29%), weakest in Scotland (10%).

In its analysis, the *Guardian* points to wider lessons for the Labour Party in Britain (and by inference the Labor Party in Australia). Labour's inability to appeal to UKIP voters appears related to its inability to offer a distinctive policy alternative to the Conservatives (rather than embracing the status quo of a distribution of economic power and the resultant inequality in wealth). In particular the current bipartisan enthusiasm for a *laissez-faire* attitude to the behaviour of business.

*"The penetration of European and national institutions by a business class which pays itself too much, ignores the social costs of its ventures, and feeds inequality, has gone to far... If progressive politics is passive, the insecurity that freewheeling capitalism breeds will simply find uglier outlets."*

## The differential benefits of red tape - metamorphosis of the pheasants

In the same edition of the Guardian, George Monbiot reminds us of the rural manifestation of the British plutocratic class: "we subsidise the landed gentry and shotgun owners. While the poor face brutal insecurity, the rich are scarcely troubled."

The reference to guns arises from the successful intervention by Prime Minister Cameron to freeze the cost of gun licences despite a rise in the cost of the police registration process, generating a subsidy to gun-owners worth seventeen million pounds per year. Pheasants in the gun sights are similarly subsidised by a remarkably compliant set of regulations.

Pheasants bred for sporting slaughter are initially classified as livestock and thus exempt from VAT and planning controls on the grounds the landowner is producing food. Once they are released they are classified as wild animals – otherwise you wouldn't be allowed to shoot them. Those who survive the slaughter can be recaptured for use as breeding stock but need to be re-classified as livestock since it is illegal to catch wild birds with nets. However if they cause damage to gardens or passing vehicles and people inside them, there is no liability of the breeder even if the pheasants are being held for breeding purposes - suddenly they are wild animals again. Monbiot suggests:

*"in the treatment of pheasant shoots we see in microcosm what is happening in the country as a whole. Legally, fiscally and politically, the very rich are protected from the forces afflicting everyone else."*