

More Reasons Why the Brexit Party Will Win No Seats

by Paul Oakley



Nigel Farage first revealed his belief in Eurosceptic unity when he set up the cross-party “Grassroots Out” campaign for the referendum four years ago. So it must have been deeply-disappointing for him when Boris Johnson decided that he didn’t want or need any Brexit alliance with him. But does Nigel himself support unity amongst all Eurosceptics? Not exactly.

The unwelcome EU elections were called in spring 2019. The UK Independence Party would be standing and so would the shiny new Brexit Party. So. Without any approval from the UKIP leadership, I had a word with a colleague, Alan Bown. He’s a wise old owl and a significant donor. We agreed that a TBPUKIP treaty was sensible and Alan should chat to Farage about it. I hung up the phone and he called me back within three minutes.

“No way. Nigel says they don’t want us or need us.”

Oh.

Well, perhaps the knowledge that Nigel had gleaned from his years in UKIP would indeed change the whole UK political system. For Good. Old mistakes wouldn’t be repeated and there’d definitely be no new ones.

As a party Big Dog I was granted my choice to be a UKIP candidate in Eastern area for that May poll. It was time to tease my old pal Tim Aker, former UKIP MEP for the same region, who had defected to the Brexit Party.

“I’m going to smite you at all the hustings,” I told him.

“Good luck with that. I’ve not been picked to stand,” he told me.

Nor had he. In fact, one-time UKIP MEPs were almost completely absent from the cohorts of Brexit Party candidates. Apart from Nigel, the only retreads were Jonathan Bullock and Nathan Gill. I spoke to a few of the veterans whose knowledge and experience had been spurned. Although disappointed, they weren’t snowflakes so would suck it up. The cause is all.

You know the rest. UKIP’s campaign was hobbled by media fixation on one minor candidate who said that he might “cave” and rape a Labour MP. We polled a pitiful 3.2% and things then descended into student-unionist factional irrelevance.

So perhaps I should stroll over to the Brexit Party? A lot of Kippers were thinking the same thing but it seems that Nigel is in the huff with most of us. The £100 candidates’ application fee which I’d paid was quietly reimbursed to my account on 9th September without a word. Never mind. I can suck it up for the cause too because it would be disastrous if the new Tory leader adopted Theresa May’s policy of capitulation to Brussels. Besides, most TBP aspirants were bound to be

disappointed because the party would surely only be standing in a few seats at any general election. Surely?

The Brexit Party has already pinched many UKIP policies and hopes to grab its voters too. So there are transferable lessons to contemplate. In all but four of the 35 by-elections UKIP fought until 2009, the party lost its deposits. Oftentimes it had no electoral registers or databases; sent no postal vote leaflets and had nothing better than ruled A4 sheets as a rudimentary canvassing record.

By the tail-end of the following year, things changed. From November of 2012 to May 2016, the party lost just one deposit but came second in ten by-elections, winning Clacton for Douglas Carswell in October 2014 and Rochester and Strood for Mark Reckless the following month. These were the first professional campaigns and it certainly helped that both Carswell and Reckless were already sitting MPs with intimate knowledge of their constituencies.

Throwing everything at a single seat in a by-election is one thing. Battling 624 all at the same time as UKIP did at its peak in the 2015 general election is quite another. At that poll it had just 40,000 (notional) footsoldiers, a fraction of the personpower available to the old parties. The result was a single seat won for 3.8 million votes and 12.8% of the poll. Yet today's Brexit Party is flatlining at a mere 3%.

By the time of the 2017 general election, many believed that Theresa May would implement the referendum result so a UKIP vote was pointless. Nevertheless, there were twelve seats in that election where the party polled 7% or more. Save for Buckingham which is now thankfully Bercow-free, that Brexit bedrock should have been the sole focus for any anti-EU party in this election. Instead, the Farage crew has decided to dilute itself by standing in a full 281 seats.

UKIP had also been educated by the LibDems nationally and the

Greens in Brighton Pavilion who'd realised it's crucial to target voters in prime areas for months in advance of any election. That isn't to say that BP head office isn't trying its best as demonstrated by a recent email to activists.

"We are providing training to help you canvass and learn how to use our new technology which has already become a huge success with the team. For those who aren't tech savvy, don't worry, we will show you how you can play your part too."

This was on 30th September, a mere ten weeks before polling day on December 12th. Good luck with that.

Certainly, the CVs of TBP PPCs show impressive real-life achievements away from politics. Yet whether Nigel Farage likes it or not, seats are won by the people blooded and blistered in local, regional, national and supra-national polls over many years. Local branches are also quite useful, to say the least. Yet TBP has none. Much of its amateurish activism is simply wasted anyway. In October the party set up a street stall outside Lewisham Station, one of the areas most barren of Leavers in all of south-east London as the local UKIP branch could have told them. So I got in touch with the Nigel's press officer Gawain Towler. My view?

"These political twinks will be bummed to death in a real First-Past-The-Post election."

His view?

"I'm finding out issues. Best have beer."

We will, and hopefully to toast a Boris Johnson working majority. It's all very well standing down where there are already Tory MPs, but Johnson can only achieve that majority if they win in the 63 marginals where his candidates are within 5% of sitting Remoanes; and where TBP have,

unhelpfully, chosen to run. It's hard to see how a replica of the previous hung Parliament could get Brexit done. On the contrary, it increases the chance of a Losers' Vote or the repeal of Article 50 altogether. Accordingly, it is perhaps Nigel's new party which could kill Brexit. For good.

Paul Oakley was UKIP General Secretary and Immigration spokesman until he resigned in July 2019. He was a candidate in 10 elections and campaigned for the party in many more. Author of the book "No-one Likes Us. We Don't Care", he kinda knows what he's talking about.