

MINIMUM GOVERNMENT

Europhiles (or Euro-Nationalists as they should really be called) like to suggest that UKIP supporters and other opponents of the EU are motivated by a dislike of foreigners - xenophobia is the new buzz-word. In reality it wouldn't matter if the EU was made up of any combination of our 'favourite' nations or was even just a home grown UK product, it is the fundamental nature of the EU we are against.

We have often tried to illustrate this by drawing parallels between the European Union and the old Soviet Union. A good 'picture' is created by the idea that when the Berlin wall came down it wasn't so much the triumph of freedom and democracy but the simple recognition that Western Europe was now run on similar, one party state, anti democratic lines as the East but was just doing better job economically.

I think we can make a reasonable case for this argument. The UK a one party state? Not far off it. The policies of the three main parties are very similar and they are all unrepentantly in favour of the UK's membership of the EU. This EU membership constrains them so much that they cannot offer us any true choice anyway.

Do we live in a state run command economy? Pretty much. Three quarters of our economic activity is state run and the remaining quarter run by small businesses is being regulated to death. Three quarters state run? Well yes, from an individual's point of view you might as well class the large multinationals as part of the undemocratic 'state'. They have more clout than many governments and they certainly aren't democratically accountable. There isn't anything intrinsically wrong with governments or large multinationals, we need both. It is just that they are both intrinsically monopolistic, and now they have got out of hand.

In UKIP we are all sure that we are 'against' the EU bureaucratic 'big government'. The question is what are we 'for'? A slightly smaller 'big government' system? Or 'small government' per se? In my opinion UKIP should declare itself the party of 'small government'.

Generally the state must shrink. We need fewer but better paid civil servants. A civil servant in the MOD with the same notional authority as a Colonel is paid the same as a Corporal, getting rid of half the civil servants and doubling the salary of the others would be a good start. Whatever Gordon Brown thinks you can't just magic away civil servants by 'computerisation' we need to change what they do – to simplify the business processes. For example, we could replace the massively complicated tax system with a simple 'flat tax', introducing a single rate, say 20%, that applies to every source of income. Then, instead of the complex state benefits system, move to a simple state grant, made without means test, to every person in the country (much like child benefit). This needs to be low enough to encourage people to work but high enough to eradicate true poverty. A grant of £400 per month for every adult and £150 for every child under 18 (paid to the parents!) might be an appropriate level. Think of the issues this would solve at a stroke. The concept of a minimum wage becomes irrelevant. The benefits trap, where people have no incentive to work because they lose their benefits when they work, disappears. The whole concept of a separate pension system is unnecessary. Not to mention that it acts as a maintenance grant for students, it supports family units, etc. The 'supply side' savings of all this simplification must be enormous. This isn't even an issue that should divide the political 'left' from the political 'right' – except perhaps over the level of the grant and the tax rate to set.

Politicians must clean their act up. In our form of democracy we are supposed to elect full time 'representatives' who will have the time to look into the complex issues that make up our modern world, research the evidence, debate the arguments and come up with sensible legislation. So what do our current 'vanilla' variety of mainstream politicians do? Set up focus groups to find out what our gut instincts are and then adopt that as policy to ensure they get re-elected regardless! Politicians need to learn to trust the individual again and not use the state to control everything. If you control people too much the rules imposed are generally held in contempt and breaking the rules is considered the right thing to do. The 'tyranny of the majority' must be avoided. In a democracy the government must show a clear and compelling reasons why the liberty of individuals must be restricted not the other way round. Politicians should be forced to submit all legislation to proper parliamentary scrutiny. No enabling acts or statutory instruments, that empower a minister to draw up huge amounts of legislation away from the scrutiny of parliament, should be allowed. If a government can't find time to present all it wants to do to parliament then it is probably doing too much. We have to stop political manipulation of our constitutional affairs for political interests (this government has been worse than most). If we can't go back to the old 'Lords' make-up then the upper house should be democratically elected but in a way that provides a different make up to the lower house. Proportional representation is an obvious candidate, allocate a seat for every 0.5% of the vote gained.

To sum up. I believe that UKIP should produce a radical manifesto, which commits us to progressively slimming down the UK governmental structure and drastically reducing the control the state exerts over the British economy and our traditional British freedoms. It is the logical conclusion of what we think about the EU. It is what would be good for our country and, incidentally, it puts clear blue water between us and the other three main parties, giving the people of this country a clear political choice at the next general election.

Michael Wigley

This text was the basis of the proposal speech for a motion, at the 2004 October UKIP annual conference, that committed UKIP to a Minimum Government manifesto. The motion was passed and indeed flat taxes were included in the 2005 UKIP General Election manifesto.