

## Why Globalisation benefits the BNP

The British National Party's success in the recent European parliament elections, including the election of Nick Griffin, its leader, has met with predictable outrage amongst Britain's mainstream politicians and anti-fascists. Mr. Griffin's Conservative opponent, Sir Robert Atkins, dismissed the BNP as "an aberration", while the Labour candidate, Arlene McCarthy, told a crowd at Manchester town hall that the BNP was "a party whose members include convicted rapists". Low voter turnout reflecting widespread disaffection with the Labour government was seen to have let in the BNP, prompting politicians to once again implore citizens to stop shunning the polling stations and to play a more active part in politics.

But instead of dismissing the BNP out of hand, all of us who rightly loathe racism and extremism should ask ourselves why so many ordinary people in and outside the UK are concerned with rising crime and immigration; why they feel so threatened and why mainstream politicians seem incapable of offering solutions? If, as we're led to believe, support for the BNP represents the protest of frustrated voters, that can only be because mainstream political parties are failing in a very fundamental way. And since this phenomenon is occurring not just in UK, it cannot simply be put down to the row over MP's expenses. But good news is at hand if our politicians wish to heed it! For there's a strong connection between voter apathy, the concerns of the marginalised who protest by seeking simplistic far-right solutions, and those on the left who abhor racism and protest at international summits such as the G-20. Why? Quite simply, because those sections of society share the common bond of no longer being represented by our so-called democratic system. They've effectively been disenfranchised.

Now, politicians - and perhaps many readers - might find such a statement ridiculous. After all, we have elections, don't we? Indeed we do. And they're free and fair, aren't they? Indeed they are. But does that necessarily mean we have democracy? For democracy surely implies not just the *mechanics* of free and fair elections, but the ability of different political parties to choose and, if elected, to implement their freely chosen manifestos. On the face of it, that may appear to be the case. So, we need to look a little deeper to uncover the connection between voter apathy, the rise of the far-right and the G-20 protests.

### Anti-Democratic Global Competition

The explanation is that today's competitive global economy subtly yet effectively reduces the span of feasible policy options open to political parties once they come to govern. Today we live in a global and largely borderless economy where capital and transnational corporations generally structure their production wherever profits are highest and costs lowest. No government, whatever the party, can now impose significantly higher taxes or regulations on corporations for fear of them moving employment elsewhere. Similarly, governments seeking to tighten environmental or labour legislation or to place higher taxes on corporations to help the unemployed or under-privileged in society would be seen by global financial markets as 'uncompetitive', prompting instant punishment through devaluation, capital flight, inflation and an acceleration in jobs moving elsewhere. Even the mere mooted of such policies would cause the computers of market traders to instantly move capital to some other economy offering an environment 'more conducive to business needs'.

Democracy presupposes that political parties can freely represent *and implement* policies which reflect a wide diversity of public opinion and consequently a wide range of feasible measures covering the entire political spectrum. But the ability of corporations and investors to move their investments across national borders now represents a sinister and significant anti-democratic force which squeezes the feasible policy parameters to what governments know will not upset corporations and the markets. These narrow parameters thus exclude all those restorative policies traditionally espoused by the political Left to protect the poor and the environment from business interests and market failures. Little wonder, then, that this translates into a deteriorating environment, a rapidly expanding gulf between rich and poor, an unraveling of social cohesion and, as Nick Griffin's success once again demonstrates, a tendency – albeit wholly misguided - for under-privileged and marginalised sections of society to resort to far-right political parties.

### **Globally mobile capital spotlights the Far-Right**

It's as if democracy could be portrayed as a theatre stage with politicians and their parties as the actors spread across the stage from left to right. In genuine democratic conditions, the spotlights would light the entire stage giving the audience (i.e. the electorate) a clear and illuminated view or choice across the entire political spectrum. But the fierce competition between nation states engendered by globally mobile capital and corporations has interfered with the lighting system so that only the right half of the stage remains illuminated leaving the left in total darkness and its actors invisible. Both the actors finding themselves shrouded in darkness and the electorate seeing a restricted stage thus unwittingly and automatically shift their stance or gaze towards the illuminated part of the stage on the right. Whilst the shift of traditional left-of-centre parties towards the right is usually seen as a function of party-political expediency, we should be aware of the underlying anti-democratic forces at work. Both voters to the left of centre and the poor and unemployed who see their livelihoods under threat are today effectively deprived of political expression and of their democratic rights. So is it any wonder they take to the streets or to the Nick Griffins of this world in protest? Or that voters shun the ballot box in droves when global competition dictates that all parties in power are effectively forced to follow substantially the same market and corporate-friendly agenda? Paradoxically, the poor, the marginalized, anti-globalisation protesters and apathetic voters all share something in common. They are all victims of a pervasive international "regulatory paralysis"; a governmental paralysis engendered by the global free-movement of capital. Instead of opposing or dismissing each other, they'd do well to realize that they should, in reality, all be on the same side.

That politicians implore citizens to defend democracy when it was politicians themselves who hollowed it out by deregulating markets, thus surrendering democracy to the demands of globally mobile capital, is surely the height of hypocrisy. If anyone is to blame for the rise of the far-right, it is our mainstream politicians. Indeed, it's surely high time people spoke out and told our blind politicians that their so-called "democracy" has become little more than a market and corporate-dominated pseudo-democracy; one in which politicians have become but the unwitting puppets of globally mobile capital; the pawns in a game of destructive global competition which no nation can win and, as growing global problems such as global warming and the rise of the far-right show, we are all likely to lose.

### **Escaping the Vicious Circle**

If politicians want to halt and reverse the rise of the far-right and wish to lead us once again according to genuine democratic principles, they must start co-operating with one another to

expose and disarm the anti-democratic forces of transnational capital and corporations and the intense international economic competition their free movement has set in train. Politicians must therefore co-operate to impose higher taxes and environmental standards on corporations. They must co-operate internationally to use the revenues raised to fund debt-free sustainable development and higher social and environmental standards in the South as well as to help the poor and socially excluded in the North. They must cancel Third-World debt and co-operate to raise taxes on currency speculators and impose the necessary restraints on their industries to reduce emissions. They must co-operate to ensure mutual security for all the world's nations and so remove the massive waste of the bulk of military spending. They must use the savings to help the Third World out of poverty and so arrest rampant population growth, the spread of Swine Flu and other global pandemics. In doing so, they'll equally remove the need for mass-migration and so stem the flow of asylum seekers. That way they'll assuredly kill three birds with one stone by removing the grievances of both anti-globalisation protestors and of those who protest by voting for the far-right. Furthermore, they'll succeed in restoring genuine democracy and so bring peoples all over the world back to the ballot box.

But in a globally competitive world, how are our leaders to achieve such goals? How can they fulfil their proper roles to lead the world from destructive competition to fruitful co-operation in which the good of each nation is contained in the good of all? We could perhaps hope that the people who got us into this mess - our politicians - might get us out of it. Or we could realize that we don't need to wait for them to fail again. Instead we can, already today, take back control by signing up to the international Simultaneous Policy (Simpol) campaign.

Simpol is a unique global campaign that allows citizens to drive the world's politicians towards implementing the right global solutions - simultaneously. The basis of Simpol is that all or sufficient nations are to implement the needed stringent measures *simultaneously*, so avoiding the fear that first-mover nations would lose investment and jobs to other countries. By posing no-risk to any nation's economy or its international competitiveness, the causes of the present regulatory paralysis are removed. Likewise, simultaneous action removes the excuses for inaction and delay and opens the way to far more robust policies being adopted than relatively weak agreements we see governments trying to implement today, such as the Kyoto Protocol to curb global warming. Not only could simultaneous international action open the way to solving the global recession and global warming, it would allow a host of other global problems to be solved too.

Announcing his support for Simpol, Lembit Opik, one of a growing number of MPs who support the campaign summed it up when he said, "We live together at once, on the same small planet. There are some things we should do together, at once, on this same small planet. The compelling logic of Simultaneous Policy is really collective common sense – it's a campaign to find out how common sense really is!"

But what about nations that refuse to cooperate internationally? To secure sufficient international political will for the implementation of the Simpol, citizens around the world who support it, known as Adopters, not only decide the global policies to be implemented, they tell all the politicians in their constituency area that they will be voting in future national elections for *any* candidate, within reason, who has signed the pledge to implement the policy alongside other governments. Or, if they have a preferred party, they encourage that party to support Simpol. In this way, citizens are seizing the political initiative, firstly, by taking the task of global policy-making out of the hands of politicians and, secondly, by intensifying the

competition between candidates to a point where politicians who fail to support Simpol risk losing their seats to those who do.

This new way of voting even though adopted by only a relatively small number of people has already resulted in 27 UK MPs and countless candidates pledging to implement Simpol alongside other governments. With more and more parliamentary seats and even entire national elections being won or lost on fine margins, it needn't take many of us to make it in the vital political interests of the main politicians and parties to support Simpol, thus offering Adopters the opportunity of driving even uncooperative governments to sign on.

Ambitious, no doubt. But do we really think politicians are going to save the world for us? Do we really think they can achieve international cooperation on their own? It's not just politicians who need to wake up: it's us. What Simpol offers is a powerful way for us to do that; a powerful way for citizens to show our politicians that "when the people lead, the leaders will follow".

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