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## *UKIP can Force a Referendum*

by a member of the United Kingdom Independence Party

By not going to the country last Autumn Mr Brown let the Conservatives off the hook as well as himself. He must have worked out a logic that went unnoticed by the media. For an election in 2007 the Conservatives would have had to promise a referendum before ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, because otherwise UKIP would have gained votes as the only party to do so. Then Mr Brown would have had to do a U-turn to avoid losing votes to the Conservatives, and himself offer a referendum: which he is determined not to do: so, no election before ratification. Mr Cameron will now be able to go through the motions of parliamentary opposition before accepting the Amending Treaty, with a private sigh of relief, as a *fait accompli*, well off the agenda before the next election.

UKIP is in the basic difficulty of relying on democratic processes without trusting the democratically elected parties, and without being able to obtain the parliamentary representation that would allow the party to enact the will of the people. Quite likely the majority of the British electorate agrees with us, or if not could be persuaded, but not to the extent of voting UKIP in general elections. The mainstream parties can ignore the majority as they ignored for many years the pro-hanging majority, because they know that when it comes to general elections the matter will not be decisive. It is an admission of a dilemma for UKIP to demand a referendum, because to do so acknowledges that none of the democratic mainstream parties want independence. Is there any point in thrusting independence upon a nation that doesn't much want it? Or has UKIP to aim at a hardly imaginable clean sweep of the deadbeat parties? We might do better to make such a nuisance of ourselves that one or more of the mainstream parties embraces our central policy of national independence from the EU.

Howbeit, the party is making what fuss it can about the refusal by Labour, supported by the Liberal Democrats, of the referendum promised by all parties under Mr Blair.

In the last but one *Independence* Nigel Farage, leader of UKIP, realistically accepts that there will be no British referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon, and answers the question "What does this mean for us?" with "We must gather, marshal and support the best possible candidates to become MEPs."

This looks like a strategic error. Success in Euroelections does not make enough difference, though Nigel Farage himself has made more than seemed likely of his role as MEP. What UKIP needs, if it is not just to go on competing with the Greens for the prize of being the fourth British party, is Westminster representation or, failing that, a winnable referendum on "Europe".

The immediate question is how to get it. In my view UKIP's steady though small electoral prospects put the party in a position to be able to force a referendum if it so chooses, but only on one rather unpalatable condition.

UKIP can make an offer to one or both of the big parties, which would be hard for them to refuse, of an electoral pact. (The Liberal Democrats are obviously our natural enemies with whom no accommodation will ever be possible.)

The offer would be not to oppose the candidates of the party with which the pact was made, on two conditions.

(1) That party would make a manifesto commitment to hold a referendum on the EU within six months of taking office. This would be a commitment of the party, not individual candidates.

(2) UKIP would be given a clear run in at least 12 seats, preferably safe Liberal-Democrat seats (if there is such a thing) where the party with which the pact is made is currently third or lower and has no realistic prospect of gaining the seat. Most of these constituencies should be in England but there should be opportunities in Wales and Scotland.

*What* referendum question to ask would have to be carefully thought about. Perhaps not at this stage an all-out “Should the United Kingdom leave the European Union?” If there was this straight in-or-out vote in the near future, we might well lose it; we can’t afford to repeat 1975 and some of us are not in a position to wait another thirty years. All the same, have we a better short-term prospect than to make one or more of the deadbeat parties promise some sort of EU referendum?

And the second part of the proposal gives the only feasible prospect UKIP has of Commons representation in the foreseeable future. Messrs Brown and Cameron are both obsessed with getting people to vote for them. The loss of UKIP/Referendum Party voters was disastrous to the Conservative Party in 1997 and may well be enough to keep them out of office even now that we are all thoroughly sick of New Labour. The chances are that one of the parties, probably of course the Conservatives, would accept our offer.

What’s in it for UKIP? A real chance both of a referendum which would put “Europe” at the centre of British politics, and of a few MPs.

The precedent is Labour in 1906. The depressing establishment of Labour as one of the two great parties in the state was made possible in the first place by the Liberals’ giving them a free run in a few constituencies (which as it turned out was not necessary for a Liberal majority).

Further, the logic about the October 2007 non-election might still work. If a Conservative–UKIP electoral pact looked likely, Labour might still be pressurised into the U-turn and offer a referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon. Given the choice, Mr Cameron would rather win the election even if that meant the awful prospect of a referendum on the EU. If he declared as much now, Labour would have to join the bandwagon, for the same reason: the fear of losing the election. So we could get the referendum we want.

But for that to be possible moves would have to be made quickly, before the treaty is approved by Parliament.

Mr Farage is now reported as saying that at the next [British] general election UKIP will not oppose candidates who offer a referendum on the EU. This is a step in the right direction but not well enough thought through. What good would this do either UKIP or national independence? At best it might secure the election of a few individual non-UKIP MPs committed to a referendum. They would all be receiving non-UKIP party whips. With 50 such MPs in the Commons there would be no more prospect of either an actual referendum or UKIP representation at Westminster than there is now.

My recommendation of trying for an electoral pact is a more hopeful strategy both for UKIP and national independence than the concentration on the “European” “Parliament”. And if a pact is unobtainable, UKIP would be able to make good use of the refusal and go into the next election trumpeting that no other party would call a referendum.

I ask the party leadership to consider this before Her Majesty signs the Treaty of Lisbon.