

Illusions in the British Election Campaign

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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Election watching in Britain usually takes various forms. This time, the challenging nutters have been said to be getting the runs on the board, and the voters are having the most interesting, if confusing spread, in years. This terrifies the incumbents, and worries the orthodox challengers such as the Labour Party, whose Achilles heel so happens to be its head. Ever since suffering a Tony Blair engineered castration, New Labour is no longer neo, and is attempting to claw back some votes from the rather confused centre.

Ed Milliband is, in fact, so concerned about the tightness of the contest he decided to pay comedian “of the people”, Russell Brand, a visit at his apartment in Shoreditch, east London. Milliband went for the slang (“It ain’t gonna be like that. Change is hard right?”); Brand went for the big meat issues: those “unelected powerful elites” as puppet masters of the earth; the Murdoch empire, inequality, the housing problem.

And whether people should even vote. “We all got excited by Tony Blair, we all got excited by Barack Obama and what happened?” Hence the reason he had never voted in his life – “because I think it doesn’t matter.”[1] Brand is certainly hard to refute on that one, even if not voting is a recipe for political incapacity. The value of the vote diminishes as a proportion to the weight an illusion of hope exercises. The better the illusion of hope, the more likely a vote might be made. That, however, explains exactly why Milliband, arguably one of the least convincing leaders in years, is doing the rounds with a person the British Prime Minister has dismissed as a “joke”.

British society boasts one, all fascinating reality, apart from the seeming immutability of the National Health Service. For all the pretences of modernisation, of a sceptred isle that speaks of Westminster democracy and the liberties supposedly breathing in the common law, it remains, if not class-riddled, then certainly network riddled. The New Labour experiment was designed to mask it even as it claimed to change it.

The enervating nature of current politics, etherised by the Campbell-Blair line of manufactured enthusiasm for over a decade; the sound bite, which is merely neat cover for establishment politics, continues to cloak British political life. This is what the United Kingdom Independence Party is attacking, insisting that it will challenge the stifling networks of qangos, the sweet deals, the musty public school boy chatter.

Two general elections, argues columnist Gerald Warner, are taking place. The first is “the fantasy election being conducted within the imagination of the political class, the BBC, the dead-tree press and the vast array of public bodies, qangos, and similar running dogs of the consensual establishment.” That class is supposedly pro-Europe, metropolitan, elitist, politically correct “and wholly divorced from real-life Britain.” The second election will only figure on May 8 – “the first occasion” which “concrete reality” will visit those of the virtual

world.[2]

In so doing, they are marketing another illusion. It is the anti-Europe vision, one of chest thumping Britain happy to labour away in the sunshine, or perhaps drizzle, of freedom. In some instances, the rhetoric from UKIP is happily populist and anti-establishment. At stages, its only difference with the more extreme BNP is one of shaved heads.

Perhaps one of the most dangerous themes in this election, and not simply because Chris Patten, Britain's last governor of Hong Kong, thinks so. "The UK no longer wields the international influence it once did; indeed, Britons hardly seem to be bothered by their downgraded importance - or even very much aware of the implications." The nationalists persist in peddling the "delusional belief that the UK can exercise the same degree of control over global events that might have been possible 50 years ago." [3]

The mania with Europe - its influence over Britain, its perceived intrusiveness and groping of British institutions like a horny French pimp, has produced the tremors that can only be called delusion. As Prime Minister David Cameron tried, unconvincingly, to explain in 2013 when things were getting chilly with Brussels, "We have the character of an island nation - independent, forthright, passionate in defence of sovereignty." [4] That is what UKIP has induced, an illusion that is catching, a form of mental debility.

His suggestion then, something which he is emphasising in the lead-up to the election, is that he will take the issue of continued EU membership to a referendum come 2017. His efforts thus far to renegotiate the treaty with the EU have, however, fallen flat. Britain, in short, is Europe's big boor, the sozzled oaf.

The idea of detachment from Europe could only be the stock sentiment of a power capable of going its own way with any constructive gumption. This implies power, and not merely of the pedestrian, light-weight sort that acts as the alibi for banksters. This is imperial, and the imperialists of all sorts, be they the beer swilling trotters of the UKIP side, or some of the Tory fold, are convinced that Britain matters on the world stage. In truth, the stage left them decades ago.

The sense that chaos is descending on British politics is, for all of that, fitting. The electoral patient is fed up with the feed. No one quite cuts the mustard - and the alternatives are proving politically racy or extreme. But they have the political mainstream on the run.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

Notes:

[1]

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/30/world/europe/miliband-takes-his-election-pitch-to-russell-brands-audience.html?_r=0

[2]

<http://www.breitbart.com/london/2015/04/22/there-are-two-general-elections-underway-the-virtual-poll-of-the-political-class-and-the-real-contest/>

[3] <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/british-election-lies-by-chris-patten-2015-04>

[4]

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/01/wait-the-sun-hasnt-set-yet-british-conservatives-great-power-delusion/272609/>

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