

UKIP public meeting draws a huge crowd

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"The old parties simply can't attract large numbers to a political meeting, yet UKIP can. How do they do it? Three reasons, I think..."

[By Roger Helmer MEP](#)

Last Thursday evening, freshly decanted off the Brussels plane, I drove to Saint Ives in Huntingdonshire (not Cornwall, thankfully), to a UKIP meeting. And I was astonished.

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Through my dozen years as a Conservative MEP, I was occasionally asked whether I held public meetings, and I had to explain that if I announced a public meeting, Joe Public would rather stay home and watch Coronation Street, and I'd probably end up with an empty hall, with two punters and a dog (if I was lucky). You'll have to set up the meeting, I'd say to Rotary Clubs, or Chambers of Commerce, or Wind Farm protest groups, and I'll come and talk to it.

St. Ives is not a huge town, but in the Burgess Hall there must have been at least 400 people who'd turned out for a political meeting. Many were UKIP members (we had a show of hands) but the majority were simply concerned citizens. There were thirty round tables, each seating ten or so. We had additional cinema-style seating on one side, and folk were still standing at the back of the cavernous hall (which is also used for election counts, so that you have a sense of the scale). Leaving aside Party Conferences, I don't think I've ever seen so many people at a political meeting.

It was good to be back in Saint Ives. I used to live there in the seventies (69 Needingworth Road, as it happens) when I was working for Clive (now Sir Clive) Sinclair. My children were born down the road in Cambridge in the Mill Road hospital.

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The old parties simply can't attract large numbers to a political meeting, yet UKIP can. How do they do it? Three reasons, I think. First of all there's UKIP Leader Nigel Farage, who has a high profile and a well-deserved reputation as a powerful speaker. People will clearly come to hear him.

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Then secondly, there's the public concern over the EU. Almost nightly, it seems, for a couple of years we've had the euro crisis on our television screens. Voters can't avoid it, and they don't like what they see. Five years ago it was possible to say (and colleagues constantly said to me) "The public don't really care about Europe. It's way down their priority list. There are no votes in it" (though there were certainly votes in it in 2009, when UKIP beat the Labour Party into third place).

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Today, that logic no longer applies. The EU's great slow-motion train crash has become almost soap opera. People can see the collateral damage that the euro disaster is doing in the UK. They are starting to understand the harm that the EU is doing to issues that they really do care about, like prosperity and growth and immigration, and lunatic green taxes and green policies. They care enough to come out on a Thursday evening to find out what they can do about it.

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And thirdly, they've realised that the three old parties (OK, two-and-a-half) are all essentially the same. Tory, Labour and Lib-Dem struggle to differentiate themselves. All three are broadly pro-Brussels, committed to EU membership, and all three are essentially social democratic parties, in favour of big government, high taxes, and stultifying welfare. The public recognise this, and they're not sure they like it, and they're prepared to miss Coronation Street for the sake of hearing a different story.

UKIP MEPs

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But Saint Ives is not an isolated phenomenon.Â Up and down the country, UKIP is defying the conventional wisdom, and running successful public meetings for hundreds of voters looking for common-sense solutions to the problems which they can see all too clearly.Â Something new and fresh and exciting is happening in British politics, and Iâ€™m delighted to be part of it.

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As I left after the meeting to drive back to Leicestershire, Nigel was doing a brisk trade selling tea-towels featuring the face of European President Rumpy-Pumpy, and Nigelâ€™s immortal line â€œAll the charisma of a damp ragâ€•.Â Apt for a tea-towel, when you come to think about it.

[Roger Helmer's Blog](#)