

UKIP's anti-Islamic voices are becoming more intense

There might be a new leader at the helm but with Richard Braine, it is the same old message with a different voice

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It seems tempting to ignore the election of Richard Braine, the new leader of the UK Independence Party. After all, its former leader Nigel Farage moved on to found the Brexit Party and much of Ukip's support seems to have migrated there with him.

But it would be a mistake to disregard Ukip. Its strongest impact was never in the parliamentary seats it failed to get, either in the House of Commons or the European Parliament. Rather, it made its mark by moving the conversation dangerously further to the right than was previously acceptable. Take, for example, the first controversy to emerge involving Mr Braine.

Footage of a hustings for the leadership race showed him complaining some British towns and cities were effectively no-go areas for non-Muslims and calling for it to be a crime to hand out copies of the Quran under laws connected to violence.

Such virulent anti-Muslim sentiment underpins Ukip and has only become more intense over the years, despite claims that it wants to distance itself from the anti-Islamic views that shaped the leadership of Mr Braine's predecessor, Gerard Batten. Mr Farage quit the party over the

issue of Islamophobia and Mr Batten's links to far-right activist Tommy Robinson. The footage of Mr Braine seems to indicate it's a different face at the helm but the same message.

For a party that is arguably on the far-right of British politics, Ukip enjoys an outsized presence in terms of press coverage. The boisterous antics of the likes of Mr Farage boosted his popularity and was handsomely rewarded by a disproportionate amount of airtime on television, a radio show on a mainstream network and a platform with various media outlets.

But as oxygen has been given to such right-wing views in so much of the mainstream media, such voices and their radical views have become normalised.

Ukip began as a Eurosceptic party and leaving the EU was the issue that defined its purpose. It never found a critical mass to vote for it as a party – but it did manage to get a critical mass to take up its one issue. As a result, the Brexit referendum of 2016 happened. The turmoil that has unfolded since is significantly down to mainstream political parties not taking seriously how to provide leadership in an age where Ukip-style populist politics can make a difference.

Mr Farage has now moved on



Newly appointed Ukip leader Richard Braine.

Plant-based food could trigger a cultural shift

RASHMEE ROSHAN LALL

The battle over foods without meat is getting pretty brawny. Last week the non-profit American Civil Liberties Union asked the US state of Arkansas to stop enforcement of a law that bars words such as “burger” and “steak” for plant-based products that contain no animal meat.

And the Centre for Consumer Freedom, a US group that lobbies on behalf of the fast food, meat and tobacco industries, placed prominent ads in American newspapers hinting that the chemicals added to imitation-meat burgers and sausages made them less healthy than the real thing.

All this took place in the week that a plant-based “egg” made from mung bean protein, canola oil, onion puree and turmeric, was welcomed onto the shelves of one of America's largest national grocery retailers.

Right around the same time, Goldsmiths, University of London, banned the sale of beef in campus food outlets as part of its bid to tackle climate change.

And earlier this month Burger King introduced the Impossible Whopper, featuring a meatless patty designed to taste, feel and even “bleed” like actual red meat, in more than 7,000 outlets in the US.

According to some estimates, the plant-based food market will be worth as much as \$140 billion in 10 years. Interestingly, the target is not the committed vegan or even the vegetarian but an entirely different group of consumers – the flexitarians.

They shift at random between



Customers at Bareburger in Dubai try its meat-free options.

omnivorous and vegetarian diets but seem to want to eat less meat and dairy, as long as the food on their plate tastes just as good.

Flexitarians appear to value the health implications of plant-based alternatives to meat, fish and eggs. They also prize the virtuous feeling of having done their bit for the planet by reducing the environmental impact of their food choices.

This is hardly surprising. Ear-

lier this month a report written by more than 100 scientists for the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), warned that rising temperatures are putting the world's food supply at risk and the West's high consumption of meat and dairy produce is partly to blame.

This is down to rearing livestock, which means the inevitable production of methane, a greenhouse gas contributing to global

warming, as well as deforestation to expand pastures.

The IPCC report reiterated, but far more starkly, something we already knew. An earlier finding from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said that raising livestock uses about 70 per cent of all agricultural land, yet represents 18 per cent of calorie intake worldwide.

It stands to reason, then, that producing food for vegetarians,

vegans and even flexitarian requires much less land than raising meat. And overfishing is increasingly seen as a reason to turn to plant-based seafood.

Even so, all the environmental, ethical and health-related arguments in the world cannot guarantee that plant-based foods will significantly change entrenched patterns of consumption.

Meat, for instance, has continued to be consumed in risin-

Manufacturers of meatless burgers and sausages are trying to woo 'flexitarians'