

COMMENT

CHANGE THE RECORD

By the time the next issue of *The Land* appears, it's pretty well certain that there will have been a General Election. It won't be "*The Land* wot won it", whatever the outcome, but we're nonetheless taking the liberty here of offering readers an early suggestion about how to use their vote.

We didn't do this last time around, so why now? There have been several minor changes in the political landscape since 2010, some promising and others less so. The Westminster electoral system is no more proportional than it ever was, but there is now one Green MP, and two pungent others apparently known as 'kippers'.

The one good thing to have come out of the relentless media fascination with UKIP is that the fortunes of minority parties no longer seem to be only of minority interest. The Green Party is on a roll, with membership doubling in 2014 and a recent poll showing 19% of 18-24 year olds intending to vote Green – it's not just old hippies with sandals and beards any more. (Although come to think of it, sandals and beards have also become strangely mainstream.) It's just as well the Green Party is in rude health, since other parties are even less attractive than ever before for those interested in 'green' issues.

Few readers of this magazine are likely to vote Conservative, and those that are will probably not be swayed by this editorial. If there are any Scrutonesque Green Tories left out there, we encourage them to reflect on what exactly their party is actually trying to conserve these days. For anyone inexplicably tempted to support UKIP, please do look into their explicitly anti-environmental policies, far worse than any other party.

Voting for the Liberal Democrats, whether on principle or tactically 'to keep the Tories out', has been rendered pointless by the existence and record of the current coalition government. Not many people will vote for them next time - and those that do really will be wasting their votes. Disillusioned Lib Dems understandably make up a sizeable percentage of new recruits to the Greens, and in some seats this group might even propel Green candidates to victory.

Supporting Labour in the hope of electing a party of social justice has been delusional since the party was rebranded as "New". Blair destroyed the party's soul by getting rid of clause four, expanding privatisation, and then invading Iraq, all in one short decade. It hasn't recovered. (Does anyone else feel rather sheepish remembering the vain hopes of May 1997?)

So, no-one will be shocked to see *The Land* endorsing the Green Party, rather than any other. After all, many things argued for in these pages are reflected in Green Party policy. These include sensible planning and housing policies for rural areas; supporting low-impact and self-build projects, while



opposing land speculation; opposing fracking, TTIP and GM; scrapping Trident and Hinkley C; land value taxation; a basic income scheme, and last but not least, renationalisation of the railways. Readers in Scotland can safely vote Green even if they are pro-independence, as this remains Scottish Greens policy. Perhaps most importantly though, only the Green Party is prepared to even talk about the need to stop the obsessive pursuit of economic growth. If you don't want these ideas to be taken seriously, you may be reading the wrong magazine. If you do, it surely makes sense to vote for them.

Still, some might be surprised that we do not take the pessimistic line pithily expressed in sentiments like "if voting changed anything they'd make it illegal", or "whoever you vote for, the Government always get in". The problem with this view is that it doesn't actually provide a reason for not voting. If there's any chance at all that voting might change anything you care about, then it's worth doing. If it doesn't work, what have you lost? After all, it doesn't usually cost anything.

There is a more principled anarchist view that supporting any party just legitimises a corrupt charade of 'democracy', concealing the truth that the views of almost everyone count for nothing, and allowing shadowy powers to continue pulling all the strings. We at *The Land* certainly have considerable sympathy with this argument. Those who bemoan the lack of a "none of the above" option on the ballot paper may also have a point. But unfortunately there's no evidence that boycotting the polls will bring any useful results. Even extremely low turnouts do not invalidate UK elections. We could all stay at home – but in reality all that would do is give those favouring the *status quo* a bigger majority.

The UKIP phenomenon reflects a widespread disillusionment with parties comprised of careerist politicians representing marginally different shades of neo-liberalism. It would be a shame if those on the left, whether through apathy or by adherence to anarchist ideology, allowed the far right to be the sole beneficiary of this centrifugal trend. The media is fickle and between now and May a surge in support for the Green Party might yet translate into more airtime and more credibility.

Voting is no replacement for other forms of political action, and certainly no replacement for bringing your own life into line with your principles. But under the circumstances, it's well worth doing.