



*Dear Simon,*

*Unlike France or Germany, the UK has never had a "green" party as part of a government coalition. What are the chances of the current Green Party to influence the election campaign and perhaps even the future government with their environmentalist issues?*

The British Green party was founded about the same time as its continental cousins, in the early 1970s. However, unlike others, the party long held a line that the political system was fundamentally incompatible with green politics, and so it didn't try to compete for power until late into the 1980s. By the time it shifted position and put up candidates, other political parties had closed much of the gap in policy, making it much harder for a distinctive green voice – in the broader sense - to be heard.

Coupled to a first-past-the-post electoral system and the Greens found it almost impossible to secure representation. Largely because of a lack of alternatives, they have had to concentrate most of their efforts into a small number of areas where they might have some success. This strategy finally paid off in 2010 with a MP elected in Brighton. However, the party remains in a very marginal position in the political system and will do well to retain that MP, let alone gain any more.

As such, while the party can point to the third-largest membership of any political party in the UK, its influence on policy or politics remains very small. At best, they can hope to point out when others 'greenwash' (talking about the importance of the environment, but without real substance) their policies. Only if a government coalition comes to be very reliant on their support will that change.

That situation is further complicated by the Greens' somewhat indeterminate position on the political spectrum. In this, they are probably closer to their German counterparts than their French ones, lacking a coherent radical left-wing position. This places them in competition not only with Labour but also the Liberal Democrats, something that the Greens have benefited from as the latter have suffering in government.

Talk soon,

*Simon*

