



# Germinal

The Brussels Labour International Branch newsletter January 2008

## Debating Europe, migration and employment rights



A meeting on employment, migration and rights was co-hosted by Brussels Labour and the European Parliamentary Labour Party (EPLP) and was chaired by our Honorary President, Lord Kinnoch. The platform speakers - with their combination of Scottish, Welsh, Turkish, Indian, Portuguese and Irish backgrounds - were very well qualified to talk about the issues affecting people who move from one country to another to work or settle.

Claude Moraes MEP spoke about the realisation amongst many in Europe - even politicians on the far-right in Italy - that migrant workers will be essential to the future success of European economies. He highlighted the difference in experience between the migration from the Commonwealth in the post-World War II period when people were invited to come and work, largely in public services, and now. Today's migration to Britain includes the many people who have chosen to move across the European Union to take up work opportunities in the countries which have accepted complete freedom of movement post-2004.

These people are paying taxes and contributing to economic success - as highlighted by Darren Clifford, the conference delegate who spoke

about the success of his small business, due mainly to his staff which includes a very well-qualified and enthusiastic Polish woman. His welcoming of the effects of the 2004 enlargement is a story that warrants repetition. Neil Kinnoch reminded us that it is *The Economist* which has been the one publication unflinching in its praise for the 2004 enlargement of the EU!

Emine Bozkurt, PvdA MEP, said that until she had been elected in 2004, she had never considered herself as a migrant! She had been born, brought up and educated in the Netherlands and her Turkish family background had never been an issue. Like Claude's family, her father had moved to follow his 'European Dream' in the early 1960s. Since being elected, she has become the key Socialist Group spokesperson on relations with Turkey and she had been really pleased to be approached by young women of Turkish origin who wanted to know how they too could become MEPs! She was firmly of the view that bringing religion into the debate really confuses things and takes attention away from



Liam Byrne MP



Emine Bozkurt MEP

basic social and rights questions.

Liam Byrne MP, Immigration Minister, said that the Government was now working on a points system for immigration, similar to the US Green Card system, and also said that as well as counting people arriving in the country, there would be a system of counting people who leave. He stressed the huge importance of integration work to ensure that the issue of increasing migration and mobility remained positive now and in the future.

Discussion and points from the floor ranged over a number of issues including the following:

- Possible Macedonian adhesion to the EU was raised and whether or when freedom of movement of workers would happen. Albanian representatives also touched on this, saying that for many countries freedom of movement was not a good thing when economies were expanding and younger, dynamic workers were needed at home at this cru-



# Conference report – or hubris in action



Once again, I braved England in September in order to attend the first half of Party Conference.

Things got off to a good start, with my conference pass arriving within 20 minutes compared to 3 hours last year. My commitment to the European cause soon saw me in the LI (Labour International) fringe event. We started what should be quite an important debate on how the PES manifesto for the 2009 Euro-elections will be written, and how to get real involvement and support from ordinary party members but somehow, I feel that the Party leadership want a lower profile approach – and that most ordinary members will be quite happy with this.

The evening saw a series of receptions – including Frazer Clarke and I feeling Andrew Neill was pursuing us round the room at the New Statesman's event, the Socialist lawyers dinner, where one younger MP was very enthused at the prospect of an early election, and the Commission party, where, perhaps wisely, we arrived after Peter Mandelson had welcomed Sarkozy's victory in France and praised Merkel's govern-



ment in Germany...

Election fever seemed to be growing on Monday – egged on by the press, who were happily asking everyone their opinion (I put a pin in June 2008 on Newsnight's board) and then it was Gordon Brown's first conference speech as Leader and PM. Of course, there was no Blair speech the following day for comparison this year but somehow it did feel much more self-assured – and was warmly received by a Party wanting to believe and palpably relieved that the transition was over and seemed to be more successful than most had dared hope. Europe got the briefest of mentions – it was important and we would be good Europeans – but with lots of red lines.

The speech included much that was authentically personal but beyond a list of all the good things we would do – or keep doing – the speech did not articulate a new vision of where we are going. Nor did it really expose and argue for the choices that politics is

really about. Since we now know that the election will not take place this year, this is an issue that Gordon needs to come back to.

Monday continued with a further dose of LI – this time with the PES President (and former Danish PM) Poul Nyrup Rasmussen attending. Later on, I met up with friends from my old constituency, Putney, who now seem to have replaced a millionaire MP with an equally wealthy constituency secretary and a new candidate who was sure that we were about to take the seat back from the Tories again. We joined the neighbouring constituency, Battersea, who had provided a choir to lead communal singing of Socialist songs at the end of a Billy Bragg fringe on House of Lords reform (I seem to remember something similar after losing the Wandsworth Council elections in 1998)...

Tuesday dawned with the very successful Brussels Labour fringe event. It was excellent to see our Honorary President, Neil Kinnock, in fine form.

A further round of main and fringe events – and plenty more hints of elections – followed, before Eurostar and a return to the reality(!) of Brussels.

*Keir Fitch*

cial time.

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• The Ambassador from Mauritius highlighted that migration was a global rather than simply European issue and that tackling poverty remained a key element in reducing migration, through European-level negotiations on Doha and Economic Partnership Agreement (EPAs).

• A visitor from Albania raised a point about lost social security/pension benefits if workers returned to their home country after a period in an EU country. Emine Bozkurt MEP said that a solution was needed to this key issue, as people were sometimes 'stuck' in their adopted country for fear of losing the right to benefits they had paid for whilst working once they

returned home.

This debate in Bournemouth took place at the same time as the European Parliament's debates and votes on a number of reports on immigration and migration, including the EU proposal for a points system (the Blue Card scheme).

*Maggie Coulthard*

## BRANCH MEETING

Richard Corbett MEP

# Dispelling the myths about the Lisbon Treaty

**B**russels Labour welcomed Richard Corbett to speak about the Treaty of Lisbon before the final text had been agreed. He stated that the Treaty would be decisive in determining the UK's relationship with the EU for a generation or more. At



*Richard Corbett with Belinda Pyke*

the time, the right-wing Eurosceptics believed that they would win the battle, which they also believed would be the first step to the UK withdrawing from the EU.

Richard added that many UKIP billionaires are now funding Open Europe, a think tank that is an odd coalition of the BNP, UKIP, the Conservatives, media and industry but they are all on same page on this.

On the subject of a possible referendum in the UK, Richard thought that it would be difficult for the government to refuse to ask the British public for their opinion, mainly because this was promised in the Labour Party manifesto and the current text is very similar to the original proposed Treaty. However, Richard also pointed out that the technical nature of the draft Treaty would make win-

ning the argument very difficult for the government, predicting that there would be a revolt in the Commons on the issue but that the government may well win the vote in the Lords.

In addition, there may be opposition from trades unions, who are concerned about a number of issues such as the Working Time Directive and the rights of temporary agency workers but this is not the forum in which to air these grievances, particularly as the draft Treaty supports social protection and actually builds on and improves on what we have now. In addition, the ETUC and all sister Socialist parties support the draft Treaty, setting the UK trade unions apart from the rest of Europe.

Richard Corbett does not believe that there is any justification for a referendum on the Treaty, as it is about the accountability and democracy of EU and is not an expansion of the competencies of the EU, except the addition of climate change in the environmental chapters, which Richard sees as a posi-



*Gordon Brown and the Portuguese PM, José Sócrates*

tive step. The Treaty would also enable more involvement in EU decisions by national parliaments and an extension of co-decision, which would have a positive effect.

Richard suggested that Brussels Labour members could support the government's refusal to hold a referendum by expressing their views through the newspapers, getting organised and help the EPLP by going to their local constituencies to get the arguments across.

There was a lively discussion, with members generally against a referendum and some thought that the Labour Party should not have proposed a referendum in its manifesto. There was a suggestion that we should team up with opposition members who do not support a referendum, to enlarge the argument to a cross-party debate. In addition, it was suggested that in order to reach a wider audience, the debate could be taken on by celebrities and on social networking sites.





# Labour and Europe: the mixed experience



*Julian Priestley responds to questions*

This year's lecture, entitled 'Labour and Europe: The Mixed Experience', was delivered by Julian Priestley, the previous Secretary-General of the European Parliament.

As Chair, Belinda introduced our speaker by commenting on the appropriateness of this title as we came together once again to remember John Fitzmaurice as a committed European and Socialist. As a new prime minister prepared to attend his first European Council in his new role, this was an appropriate time to consider the history and present state of labour relations with Europe.

Speaking fluently and without much visible assistance from his notes, Julian catalogued the highs and perhaps most frequent lows of our "European journey". He felt that John, by nature extremely frank and direct himself, would appreciate this

approach and he commented that he and John had shared many experiences, including those of being a failed parliamentary candidate.

Beginning with the Party's origin in 1906, Julian remembered that the Party had been very internationalist, which may not have been particularly pro-European but was at least outward-looking. Early developments in its ideology were strongly influenced by those in other progressive sister parties in Europe. Moreover, even if the record in office of Labour governments was not always stellar, they could point to a sure-footedness in international affairs.

A move from a "socialist" to a "labourist" emphasis was due largely to the influence of the unions. Ernest Bevin frequently asked if any particular proposal would put a pat of butter on the plate of the working man. This increasing introspection led to a conflict between the advancement of the interest of British workers and membership of a pan-European organisation. This was buttressed by an emphasis on preserving the relationship with the Commonwealth and the US. Add to this a romanticism about English history and culture, the language of Chaucer etc. and many statements would not appear out of place nowadays in a UKIP manifesto.

One exception was the consistently pro-European Roy Jenkins, although he was often accused of not being sufficiently Socialist. General pro-European sentiment was not assisted by the vetoes of de Gaulle who our monarch had asked if there was any

area in which the UK would diverge significantly from US interest. It was left to Neil Kinnock to begin again a period of constructive engagement with Europe including rebuilding links with sister parties. On the other hand, one might have expected Tony Blair to be culturally and socially the most pro-European Prime Minister. Whilst he did improve working relationships with other governments and the EU, he was held back by his pro-Americanism and, in particular, by the fractures over Iraq. Combined with his "Faustian pact" with Robert Murdoch regarding a referendum on the Euro, one had to say that the end result was a great opportunity missed for raising the UK's influence in Europe.

For a number of reasons, it is difficult to be proud about the last 50 years but there is still scope for optimism that things could change. Certainly there is a serious challenge for Mr Brown to take up.

This provocative message was followed by an equally lively questions and answers session from an extremely well attended meeting. If it could be said to reach a conclusion, it was probably that those tempted in the face of arguments about referenda and constitutions, to echo the cry "we are all doomed" were hugely overstating the dilemma.

The meeting also recorded its thanks to Paul Adamson, Simon O'Connor and their colleagues at The Centre for once again allowing this meeting to take place and for their kind hospitality.

## BRANCH MEETING

Alan Johnson MP

# Renewal, not reversal



**A**lan Johnson made time during his busy Deputy Leadership campaign to visit Brussels Labour on 12 June.

Alan set out his vision of a progressive Labour Party and how he would contribute to the renewal of the Party that has been in Government for the last ten years. He also told Brussels Labour that he was proud to have played a part in the policies that have made a real difference on issues such as child poverty, health, educa-

tion, a minimum wage, equality, work life balance, the millennium development goals and climate change.

Looking ahead to the next election, and a much hoped for fourth term in office, Alan explained that there needs to be a shift away from the personality politics that have been such a feature of the past ten years, towards policies that resonate with the British people. The challenges we face today are different from those we faced ten years ago. Climate change, energy security, counter terrorism and demographic change are all major challenges set in an international context, Alan told Brussels Labour. In order to address these issues, the UK must not act in isolation but with its international partners, particularly the European Union. Reflecting on fifty years since the signing of the Treaty of Rome,

Alan stressed the importance of re-asserting our pro-European credentials.

Turning specifically to how he envisaged the role of Deputy Leader, Alan insisted that in order to be able to focus on the needs of the Party, the Deputy Leader should also be at the heart of the policy making process. In addition, the Deputy Leader ought to be on opposition watch, explaining to the electorate that despite David Cameron's best PR efforts it's the same old Tories and the same old Tory policies.

Alan concluded that unlike the 20<sup>th</sup> century where Labour Governments were short interludes between Conservative rule, the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the century of the progressive Left.

## Brussels Labour women lead the way in Brown's government

**I**s there political life after Brussels? To judge from the appointments of advisers to Gordon Brown's new government, the answer is yes.

Former Brussels Labour members will play a key role in advising the new government, with women at the forefront:

**Emma Reynolds**, who until last year was Treasurer of Brussels Labour, and a stalwart of our branch, has been appointed as a special adviser to Geoff Hoon, the government's Chief Whip, and himself a former Member of the European Parliament.

**Mary Creagh**, MP for Wakefield, is now the Parliamentary Private Secretary to Andy Burnham, Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Mary worked in Brussels for four years, first as an assistant in the European Parliament, and then as Chair

of the European Youth Forum. Mary has also been elected Chair of the Labour Movement for Europe. Her website is [www.marycreagh.co.uk](http://www.marycreagh.co.uk) and the LME can be found at [www.lme.org.uk](http://www.lme.org.uk).

**Madlin Sadler**, special adviser to the Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, also earned her spurs as an assistant in the EP.

And **Sam White**, the only man on our list, was an active member of our branch during his time in Brussels (and Bruges!) and is now special adviser to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Alastair Darling.

Meanwhile **Oona King**, best known as the MP for Bethnal Green and Bow from 1997 to 2005, but also a former EP assistant (and not to mention a stagiaire in the Socialist Group...) was



Oona King

central to Gordon Brown's leadership campaign team. Oona has now published her diaries, entitled *House Music*, covering everything from her battles with the dreadful George Galloway to how she met the love of her life in the European Parliament. See her website ([www.oonaking.com](http://www.oonaking.com)) for further details.

We wish all of our former members every success in their new roles.

# PES Activists in Brussels get active



The consultations for the PES Manifesto for the EP elections in 2009 have been officially launched with a special website at [manifesto2009.pes.org/users/login](http://manifesto2009.pes.org/users/login) (use your PES Activists log in).

Over the next few months all activists will have the chance to contribute to the process of drafting the

election manifesto for the next European Parliamentary elections. The PES-Activists Brussels are participating in this process through working groups on the four themes.

Each PES-Activist is entitled to participate in one or more of the working groups, which will meet approximately once a month. How the groups

work and which aspects of the four themes will be discussed will be determined by the participants, with the PES discussion papers being used to trigger the debates.

The groups are divided as follows:

1. New Social Europe
2. Europe in the World
3. Democracy and Diversity
4. Save the planet

In addition to these four groups on the manifesto themes, PES-Activists are invited to take part in a working group of European Socialists in Brussels on *Migration, Integration and European Citizenship*, led by Alain Servantie. This group is not directly linked to the manifesto process but can make contributions.

The aim is that all working groups will contribute to the consultation process on the party program for the 2009 EP elections.

## How to get involved:

If you want to take part in one of these groups or to join in at the pub evenings, please send an email to Jan Kreutz, Coordinator of the PES Activists in Brussels, at [jo.leinen-assistant@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:jo.leinen-assistant@europarl.europa.eu).

## In brief

### SUMMER SOCIAL AND CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

Brussels Labour held successful Summer and Christmas social events in 2007. The Summer Social took place on 4 July at Peter and Maggie's place, and the Christmas Social was held on 5 December at Stephen and Alice's house. Many thanks to them all for their hospitality, and especially to Stephen and Alice, who have hosted the Christmas Social for many years but who will return to the UK in 2008.

### SUBSCRIPTIONS 2008

Please don't forget to renew your subscription to Brussels Labour for 2008. The 25 EUR fee can be paid in cash at a branch meeting or by bank transfer / direct debit into Fortis account 001-1128765-52. Further details are available from the branch treasurer, David O'Leary, at [dave.oleary@gmail.com](mailto:dave.oleary@gmail.com).

David is also happy to receive further donations to the Branch funds in order to allow us to continue to host successful events at Labour conferences.

### NEXT MEETINGS

Wednesday 23 January  
**Arlene McCarthy MEP** on consumer rights  
Le Meze, rue de Trèves 122 (please note the change of venue!)

Wednesday 27 February  
**Peter Skinner MEP** on EU-US relations and the US elections  
Le Meze, rue de Trèves 122

Wednesday 26 March  
**Brussels Labour AGM**