

GERMANIA

2014: EUROPE'S ELECTION YEAR

*Martin Schulz at the
John Fitzmaurice memorial lecture*

Glenis Willmott interview

Taking on the far right

**Industrial policy ■ Free movement of
workers ■ PS Autumn University**

INTERVIEW

GLENIS WILLMOTT
LEADER,
EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENTARY
LABOUR PARTY



“We will stand up for the most vulnerable”

What is on the mind of working people in your constituency and how will Labour respond in view of the local and European elections in May?

I think a lot of people are worried: worried about the cost of living and worried about job security, which ties into the recent debate about migration from Bulgaria and Romania.

How do we respond to this? Well in regards to cost of living I think Ed Miliband is doing an excellent job in highlighting those areas where people are feeling unjustly squeezed and in doing so is showing that it is the Labour party who is on the side of people even if that means taking on big business.

In regards to the worries about job security and migration we must tackle those fears head on.

People have concerns that cheaper workers will be brought in from elsewhere and take their jobs.

What need to ease those fears by guaranteeing a level playing field, by making sure domestic standards like the minimum wage are properly enforced and by closing the loopholes on issues like the posted workers directive and stop unscrupulous employers from exploiting both migrant and domestic workers.

What can we do to show voters that it is worth voting in the European elections?

Even though so much of the work we do here has a huge impact on people's daily lives it has been historically difficult to engage with the general public in elections when they are not electing a government and unfortunately the low turnouts have led to some unusual results in the European elections.

I don't think there is any magic formula to change this, we just have to work hard here and try and show people how important these elections are to each and every one of us and how it is Labour MEPs who have the answers to the problems they face.

Ed Miliband has made a key pledge to freeze energy prices in the UK. Do you think a similar policy should be followed at European level?

It is something the EPLP is looking at in the run-up to and beyond the European elections. Obviously in regards to regulating domestic energy prices that has to be something that remains a competency at Member State level but we here in the European Parliament are looking at how we can ease the pressures on energy consumers through efforts to diversify Europe's

energy supplies as well as looking at strengthening consumer protection within existing EU energy legislation.

What is the best way to fight back against nationalist, far-right parties in the UK and Europe?

In any period of economic hardship people's fears and economic anxieties become amplified and this opens up an opportunity for extreme and populist parties to exploit. We see that today in the UK with UKIP expected to do well in the European elections.

In some ways we can combat that by pushing hard to get as many of our people out to vote, in a European election this can be vital in limiting the impact of the extreme right like the BNP.

In the case of UKIP I think it is vital that we tackle them on the issues that they raise, but on our terms. When they talk about migration let's talk about social rights, when they talk about cost of regulation let's talk about the money and freedom that EU membership brings to individual families across the UK.

We also need to be better at highlighting UKIP's policies outside of the EU debate. I am confident that the more and more their position on other issues are exposed the more and more people will be turned off by them.

With the Tories calling for more austerity, what should Labour's response be, at home and in Europe?

The Tories will continue to try make deficit reduction the number one issue throughout 2014 and 2015 but for the Labour Party it is focusing on the struggles people are facing in everyday life.

We need to be realistic, budgets both in London and Brussels will be tighter, however the Labour Party will stand up for the most vulnerable in times of austerity, something the Conservatives have continually failed to do, instead they have opted to disproportionately hit the poorest in society to protect the richest.

That is why it is vital here in the European Parliament that Labour MEPs are continuing with moves to tackle tax havens and curb excessive bankers bonuses.

What can Brussels Labour do to help?

Knock on doors! Wherever it might be. I know not all members will be able to get the time to be able to go back to the UK and campaign but helping out wherever you are will be vital. We want to see more Labour MEPs in a bigger S&D Group in the next Parliament.

Interview by Martin Dawson



Voting in Belgium

EU citizens who are resident in Belgium can vote in the European Parliament elections.

To register to vote, you need to complete a registration form and send it to the communal authorities by the end of February.

*Note that if you have previously registered to vote in **European** elections in Belgium, you do not need to renew this request - but if have only registered to vote in **local** elections then you need to register!*

For more information and to download a registration form, go to:

blbe.be/en/european-elections

And please note that voting is compulsory in Belgium - so once you are registered, you must vote!

**JOHN
FITZMAURICE
MEMORIAL
LECTURE 2013**

**MARTIN
SCHULZ**
PRESIDENT OF
THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT

‘Europe can do better’ - Schulz’s European vision

Brussels Labour were delighted to host Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, who gave the October 2013 John Fitzmaurice Lecture.

This was a very well attended lecture, in the premises of the European Press Centre, with an audience of Brussels Labour activists, political leaders and influential personalities, including Glenis Willmott, leader of the EPLP and Julian Priestley, former Secretary General of the EP.

Jo Wood, Chair of Brussels Labour, welcomed and introduced Martin Schulz as the PES candidate for President of the European Commission. Indeed, through this meeting Brussels Labour made an important contribution to the preparations for the European Parliament elections in April 2014. These elections will be doubly important for European socialists because of the legacy of years of austerity and because they will be the first where European political families will field candidates for the job of Commission President.

Martin Schulz delivered a rich speech where he set out his deep personal commitment to the

European Union. He also made a clear, frank assessment of where the EU has gone wrong and what European socialists should propose as the alternative.

He saluted the commitment of John Fitzmaurice as a European and a socialist, as an inspiration for us all. Unfortunately though, under the current government, relations between the UK and the EU were getting worse. In the past he had sometimes had difficult debates with the EPLP but ultimately these had led to better results e.g. on banking legislation and health issues. This showed that for a social Europe, a Labour UK is essential.

As a passionate pro-European he felt free to criticize its weaknesses. The functioning of the institutions had let down the European ideal, in particular by interfering in too many details of people’s lives. Europe should focus on the big picture and on major, transnational issues such as organized crime, trade, tax fraud and climate change. Cameron’s Treaty re-negotiation policy was a dangerous distraction. Instead the UK should convince the EU to do things differently and make full use of the subsidiarity principle.

In a sincere, personal passage Schulz recalled how as a young man he had supported a United States of Europe but through his long experience had come to accept that nation states were here to stay as the “emotional homes of our identities”.

Now the EU had to give hope of a better life for the new generations. It was a scandal that in the richest continent in the world millions of people lived in poverty and soup kitchens were reappearing. Socialists had to be the alternative to this conservative legacy both in London and in Brussels.

Looking forward, Schulz set out how he wanted a campaign in the European elections which worked for Labour in Britain. The focus of the campaign should be about what kind of EU we want, about fixing what is wrong with the EU: Europe can do better than this!

The following discussion was equally rich, where Schulz showed his mastery of detail, such as on trade negotiations with the US, as well as new ideas on economic growth, for example through the role of regional banks. All in all, people left having the impression that they had learned an awful lot about Martin Schulz as a person and as a candidate.

Martin Dawson



‘This time, it’s different’ was the slogan used by the European Parliament to launch the 2014 election campaign. And with reason.

The 2014 polls will be the most difficult European election ever for mainstream parties. Five years of austerity, hopelessness and despair in a Europe run by the centre-right means that many people across Europe are turning to extremist parties as a protest against the establishment. Such parties could win around 20 to 30 per cent of the vote and a large number of seats in the European Parliament.

Ironically, given that a lack of democracy is one of the key criticisms of the European Union, this shift to anti-European and anti-system parties coincides with a small but significant movement in the direction of democracy.

For the first time, the choice of the President of the European Commission must ‘take into account’ the results of the European Parliament elections, and the nominee must be formally elected by a majority of all members of the European Parliament.

The European political parties are now in the

middle of selecting their candidates for the Commission presidency, who will lead the Europe-wide campaigns for the EP elections.

The Party of European Socialists’ candidate-designate, Martin Schulz, will be officially named as the centre-left candidate on 1 March. The Liberals have chosen Guy Verhofstadt; the Greens have held an online primary election, and the European Left has picked Alexis Tsipras, leader of Greece’s Syriza party. The European People’s Party - the most reluctant party about the process - will pick a candidate in early March.

Following the election, the President of the European Council will hold discussions and EU national leaders will pick a candidate. It is unclear whether they will follow the spirit of the new rules, selecting one of the ‘official’ candidates, or opt for someone else. Whoever they choose, they must get the approval of the European Parliament - a double-lock on the choice of the successor to José Manuel Barroso.

The process will be novel, and messy - but should move the EU onto a more democratic footing.

David O’Leary

**EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT
ELECTIONS
2014**



**WHY THIS
TIME, IT REALLY
IS DIFFERENT**

JOHN FITZMAURICE MEMORIAL LECTURE 2013

MARTIN SCHULZ
PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



MORE ONLINE

FULL TEXT OF THE SPEECH

MORE PHOTOGRAPHS

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Time to unite against the far right

EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT
ELECTIONS
2014



The next European Elections will see the sharp increase in the number of populist, xenophobic, Islamophobic, Eurosceptic and extreme-right MEPs elected with between 120 and 140 representatives in the European Parliament - close to one sixth of the membership.

With the Far Left Eurosceptics they will comprise more than a quarter of the Parliament. These Far Right Parties will do spectacularly well in four Member States.

In France the Fascist 'lite' Front National of Marine Le Pen (*pictured with her fellow MEPs Jean-Marie Le Pen and Bruno Gollnisch*) will win close to 20 seats and finish first. In England UKIP will finish top with another 20 seats, although will likely finish just behind the Labour Party in the United Kingdom as a whole - the only good news being that Nick Griffin and the BNP will lose their two seats.

Poland will see Tory fellow travellers the Law and Justice Party vying for first place with the more mainstream Civic Platform and probably winning.

In Holland Geert Wilder's PVV may well overtake the traditional right VVD. Elsewhere they will win up to a quarter of the seats in Austria and seats in Hungary, Belgium and Greece - where the far-right vote will be split three ways between the openly neo-nazi Golden Dawn, the extreme right Independent Greeks and the xenophobes from LAOS who've joined New Democracy. Even in Germany the populists from the Alliance for Deutschland will win seats finishing ahead of the Liberals.

Not all of these Parties are the same. Some like Golden Dawn flaunt their neo-nazi connections, others like the Front National have moderated their position and have moved from being National Revolutionaries to populist xenophobes.

In Britain in policy terms UKIP and the BNP are virtually indistinguishable, but organisationally UKIP has no 'street soldiers' or serious and sustained links with the English Defence League.

In Italy the neo-fascists of the old Italian Social Movement are now scattered across a series of



parties polluting them all. Disparate and different they still pose an enormous threat to the left and Europe.

Not all the voters of these parties come from the traditional right. Some used to vote for the left before "Austerity" persuaded them to blame strangers and then neighbours for the problems they faced, instead of the bankers, speculators or neo-liberalism. Others have been dragged from apathy by the drip drip of 'Daily Mail' islamophobia and migrant bashing into voting for the first time.

The only way to repel Marine Le Pen's threat to use this right wing political flotsam and jetsam of European austerity to wreck the Union will be to work together. Progressives must oppose their poisonous politics, but that will come from providing a radical alternative to the past rather than just more of the same. We need 'Our Europe, Not Theirs'.

Glyn Ford

Glyn has just edited, with Julian Priestley a book entitled 'Our Europe, Not Theirs', which is published by Lawrence and Wishart

ANALYSIS

EUROPEAN
INDUSTRIAL
POLICY

What place for European industry?

The February European Council will focus on European industrial policy. Coming at the end of the Barroso II Commission it will inevitably do some stock taking.

However, this is an opportunity to establish a positive economic agenda for Europe, beyond austerity.

The last four years have been dominated by crisis management in the financial markets. Industry has been neglected, unemployment has shot up and the real economy has stagnated.

The European Council will want to change this narrative by demonstrating that as Europe crawls out of the crisis the EU has clear ideas about how to support production.

Industrial policy has been a controversial subject in the past and a common approach has been elusive. There have traditionally been different approaches between key Member States.

Britain has rejected “picking winners” in business preferring a light touch approach; France has been more “*dirigiste*”, claiming the role of the state in working closely with industry; Germany has seen it as quite natural to support its manufacturing sector, in particular.

However there is a recent convergence in thinking between the big three - in 2013 Germany adopted ‘*Industrie 4.0*’, France adopted ‘*Une renaissance industrielle*’ and the UK has begun its own industrial strategy.

There is a recognition that the meaning of “industry” will have to be different in the 21st century. The “digital transition”, the “energy transition” and globalization are transforming the nature of industry.

For example, everything is becoming more intelligent and inter-connected. The internet of things, big data, 3D printing and other innovations are tearing down the distinctions between manufacturing and services, between producer and consumer.

Industrial strategy should aim to secure the conditions for competitiveness in this new world. The added value at European level would be to ensure the coherence of EU policies on competition, trade and regional policy so that a



truly level playing field is created, including at global level. Member states should also do more to pool resources for investments in joint projects, as well as research and innovation.

There is renewed interest in industrial policy, as been reflected in recent workshops and publications. In December the European Policy Centre (EPC) focused on the external dimension of industrial policy. The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) has also published a series of articles presenting a progressive vision of the role of the state in supporting industry.

A couple of months before the European elections, what is at stake is the capacity of the EU to have a bold vision for the place of European industry in the economy of the future.

Martin Dawson

The 1st of January has come and gone without a flood of Romanian and Bulgarian migrants crossing UK borders after restrictions were lifted.

Despite persistent scaremongering by the Tories and UKIP. 29 million 'benefit tourists' were going to come to Britain, they said – the entire population of the 2 countries combined! If that really is the case, could the last one to leave please turn out the lights?

The reality is that free movement of people is one of the fundamental EU rights from which we all benefit. Just think of the 2.2 million Brits living and working elsewhere in the EU – its fifth largest migrant community.

We would hit the roof if we were suddenly denied benefits in the Member State in which we live and actively contribute – but that is exactly what David Cameron and his Coalition Government have been doing. It seems that an EU Single Market that benefits business is one thing – but not when it would actually help workers and citizens in general.

What the Tories and UKIP forget is just how beneficial EU migration to the UK has been.

Far from being a burden, the vast majority of European migrants are young and hardworking, making a net contribution to the UK economy and paying in a lot more in tax than they claim back in benefits. And pressure on public services

is not coming from an onslaught of new migrants, but from the British Government's own-misguided swingeing public sector cuts and austerity policies.

We should be concerned however by the worrying trends of migrant exploitation and discrimination by rogue landlords accommodating them in unsafe and overcrowded housing, and by cowboy employers who refuse to pay them the same rate and under the same terms and conditions as UK workers, and who often exploit them further through chains of subcontracting.

EU Migrant workers' rights are guaranteed under EU rules such as those for agency workers or posted workers, but the centre-right majority in the European Parliament, Commission and Council continues to stop more progress being made.

So instead of embarking on a witch hunt, let's point the finger straight back at David Cameron and the Tory establishment – who promote free trade and globalisation without any checks and balances for social and employment rights, creating the perfect scenario for social dumping and a race to the bottom.

Instead of undermining these rights, let's stand up for a Social Europe to ensure fair and equal free movement for all!

Maureen Hick

ANALYSIS

FREE
MOVEMENT
OF WORKERS

Invited by our sister party, PS France Brussels section, Brussels Labour participated in the Autumn University alongside other sister parties in Brussels.

The event was a full day of discussions with a wide-range of high-level speakers coming from the sister parties. Amongst them: Joaquin Almunia, MEPs Pervenche Berès, Alejandro Cercas, Jo Leinen, Marc Tarabella, Zita Gurmai, national MPs Marie Arena (Belgium), and Philip Cordery (France), Richard Corbett and Julian Priestley.

Jo Wood, Chair of Brussels Labour moderated the morning session on 'Which coalitions govern Europe?'. The session looked at how coalitions and majority voting are much more frequent at European level than in the UK. It was highlighted that the social dimension needs to be emphasised more in European politics.

Given the recent nomination of Martin Schulz as the common candidate for the PES there much discussion about his chances of being elected.

There was a widespread feeling that in the Council Merkel would likely vote for him from a German perspective if he won the elections and that in the Parliament the Greens, ALDE and Linke/Left alliances would likely vote for him too.

The afternoon sessions spoke in more detail about the Europe-wide campaigns and many commonalities appeared where we could work together. A more personal and political campaign was seen positively. Interestingly enough, critics towards national party

structures in drawing up the selection lists for European candidates came from all sides of the room.

Alongside the discussions some analysis was presented on different issues the sister parties have been working on.

Such as on which parties have held the majority in the Council, Commission and Parliament, under which leadership and under which political periods. This illustrated clearly how the EU has evolved to what it is today. Also some data was presented on German feeling towards Europe and the economic crisis, alongside data showing the mood of the electorate there.

It was encouraging to meet and speak in person to the Benelux candidate for PS who represents French party members living in Belgium, Philip Cordery.

It seems our French colleagues are much better represented than us now in the national Parliament and that is having positive effects for the work going on between the different levels of political representation. Definitely something for other sister parties to think about.

The day in general was very successful at gathering local sister party members to discuss common issues.

It was a cheerful reminder that together we have a dedicated, high-level and experienced set of people representing us at the European and other levels here in Brussels, who share our goals and values.

Charlotte Billingham

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Editor

Martin Dawson

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Photo credits

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EVENTS

Pub quiz supports Syria victims

On 27 November 2013, Brussels Labour held its annual pub quiz at Cafe Place de Londres.

Congratulations to the winning team and our thanks to all members who supported another successful event.

406EUR was raised for Medicin Sans Frontieres, to support their work with the victims of the war in Syria.

Our special thanks also to MC David Earnshaw and to David O'Leary and Hwyl Jones for preparing the questions.

EVENTS

Christmas Social

Once again our thanks to David Earnshaw and Jo Wood for hosting another successful Christmas social on 18 December.

Our warm thanks to the many members who attended - from the raffle we raised 176.50EUR to put towards our campaigning activities in this very important election year.

Isobel Findlay

SUBS 2014

Are you up to date?

Please don't forget to renew your Brussels Labour subscription for 2014.

The easiest way to do this is to set up a standing order to pay your subs. The details for this are below:

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€25 per annum

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FUTURE EVENTS

Dates for your diary in 2014

Wednesday 29 January - 19:30

Branch meeting with Ivalio Kalfin MEP
FEPS, Rue Montoyer 40, 1040 Brussels

Wednesday 19 February - 19:30

Branch meeting with Claude Moraes MEP
Venue tbc

Wednesday 19 March - 19:30

Annual General Meeting
Venue tbc

Tuesday 1 April

Sister parties reception
Details to follow

Look out for our European election campaign days and weekends as well - more information to follow.