

PREPARED

PREPARING FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

Sister parties event

Claude Moraes

Ivailo Kalfin

Richard Corbett

Michael Cashman and Caroline Flint

BRANCH
MEETING

PUTTING FACTS BACK AT HEART OF IMMIGRATION DEBATE

**IVAILO
KALFIN**
MEP & FORMER
BULGARIAN
FOREIGN
MINISTER

The Branch was delighted to host Ivalio Kalfin MEP, ex-Foreign Minister of Bulgaria.

He spoke with great conviction and insight about Bulgarian workers in the UK and the way this issue has been politicized. It was important to focus on the facts and avoid stigmatization.

Bulgaria only had a population of 7 million so the scaremongering about a flood of new migrants was baseless.

Also, there are 18 Member States without restrictions to free movement so the pattern of workers' movements will be more evenly distributed compared to Polish workers coming into the UK from 2004. For every 2000 British there was one Bulgarian, usually either working or studying.

Unfortunately there have been cases of discrimination against Bulgarian students who wished to stay on and work in the UK.

Ivalio has debated with Charles Tannock MEP on this and made it clear that if there are concerns about abuse of social security systems then the relevant national rules need to be changed: it is not a problem of free movement in the EU.

Nonetheless, as a social democrat, Ivalio did argue that the Left needs to properly address concerns about social dumping and workers' rights.

Progressives should agree on common social standards and campaign for them. Posted workers having lower employment conditions than migrant workers was a loophole that needed to



be fixed.

In the discussion, Ivalio Kalfin called upon the progressive parties to develop a common message on free movement of workers for the elections. We needed to fix the real threats. Stronger European legislation in this area was sellable.

The brain drain was no good for poorer EU countries either: their tax payers were effectively subsidizing cheap labour in the richer countries. Youth exodus was a real problem but we needed incentives, not barriers, to create a sustainable balance.

Apart from policy, a heartfelt statement was made by Peter Wragg, ex-chair of Brussels Labour, that Bulgarians and Romanians were welcome in Britain! Nigel Farage had been exposed as a liar and we had to stand up against this right-wing backlash.

Martin Dawson

REFLECTIONS ON EUROPE FROM LONDON AND BRUSSELS

ANNUAL
GENERAL
MEETING

MICHAEL
CASHMAN
&
CAROLINE
FLINT

As speakers after the AGM, we were privileged to have a double bill of Michael Cashman MEP, a good friend of Brussels Labour who is standing down at the May elections, and Caroline Flint MP, shadow energy secretary.

Michael spoke of his long connection with BL, starting way before he became an MEP in 1999 – beginning with lobbying the Commission and European Parliament when working with Stonewall. A chance encounter with the Press Association Brussels’ anchor resulted in great press coverage.

1999 was an excellent time to join the Parliament, as two years after the Amsterdam Treaty, he was able to work on implementation of the new fundamental rights legal base (Art 13 TEC, now Art 19 TFEU), and also on access to documents. The failure of the Council to deliver on many of the Commission proposals under Art 13 was very sad, but he noted the commitment of the Commission – and various individual BL members – to the process.

Michael noted that in recent years, the attitude of the Cameron government, in seeking to appease unappeasable backbenchers, had threatened and diminished the UK’s role in the EU.

On migration, he argued passionately that we are in danger of recommitting the faults of the 1930’s, defaming both legal and illegal immigrants – though (quoting Thomas More in Shakespeare), vilification of “strangers” was an age-old temptation we must guard against.

Discussing the up-coming 2014 European Parliament elections, Caroline Flint indicated that these had to be about creating momentum for the 2015

General Election. The Party simply did not have the finance or resources to take a different approach. The General Election campaign will be tough and nasty – so we need to build a strong relationship with individual voters now.

The Tories will have more money than us – it is coming from companies and a small number of very rich individuals. They are also trying to manipulate the electoral system to our disadvantage – making it more difficult to get postal votes, and through changing to individual rather than household registration for example.

But we have two advantages – we are better organised, with more people on the ground; and our Party is united, while they agree on very little internally. But the biggest difficulty we face is that many have become disillusioned with politics, and fail to differentiate between the parties. There are no fixes to this, but we need to ensure we engage with the real world problems facing our voters – not simply argue about the big philosophical issues which are very remote to many. If we cannot show people that we can deliver solutions to small everyday issues, we will never convince them to trust us with big ones.

As regards the economic situation, Caroline considered that the recovery is simply NOT benefiting most individuals – we need to connect with this – but at the same time we must also show we are not anti-business. On Europe, the Party had taken a clear position that an in-out debate was a potentially costly diversion. But we should work for change from the inside.

Keir Fitch

BRANCH
MEETINGARLENE
McCARTHY
MEP**‘FARAGE’S UKIP ARE
LITTLE MORE THAN
THE BNP IN BLAZERS’**

Arlene will be stepping down as MEP at the election and she told Brussels Labour about her 20 year story of life in European politics. In fact Brussels Labour has always felt close to her since we helped finance her election campaign back in 1994 !

She later became MEP for the North West, becoming well known through her campaign to defend the “frozen mushy pea”. She was instrumental in amending the draft Directive on food colouring where a legal omission was threatening to put a local company out of business. This was a typical example of how an MEP can resolve problems by being engaged and using her contacts.

The UK is very well represented in Brussels, in all the European institutions and more widely in NGOs and associations. However this is a strange time. The challenge for pro-European Brits is to show that we are constructive Europeans. We must avoid being confused with the current British government which is actively undermining the functioning of the EU.

Arlene explained how in her view MEPs can achieve more than MPs. They work for Europe as a whole, cooperating on a cross party basis to build consensus and ensure delivery of policies. The international dimension is ever present and fascinating.

As Vice President of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee she has had a tough job because the financial industry is resisting reform. Her mission has been to maintain competitiveness in the financial industry whilst closing down dangerous loopholes.

In terms of the current debate on Europe, we face a choice between Great

Britain or little Britain. Arlene has recently published a pamphlet, available on her website, showing just how much Britain has gained from and influenced the EU. Manchester, Liverpool and other cities have been regenerated thanks to EU money and the North West has been a net recipient.

Unfortunately this message is difficult to get through because, due to the sovereign debt crisis, Europe is seen to be failing. In an open discussion with the meeting, Arlene went on to say that Clegg was naïve to try to win a direct debate with Farage.

It is more difficult to be positive and, faced with uncertainty, uninformed voters will tend to side with the negative camp. Constructive arguments should instead be channelled through social networks and well known thematic based organizations, such as the NSPCC. This will help make real connections with people’s lives.

Having seen the election of the BNP in the North West, Arlene said that in fact they have had little impact. UKIP now are like BNP in blazers and there is a risk they could do well. They need to be outed on their reactionary policies on the NHS and tax.

Her advice to the incoming MEPs was to make friends and influence. Get on committees and collaborate cross-party. Also, it is quite legitimate to defend your region’s or country’s interests but it is most effective to do so by putting it in the context of the overall European interest.

Thank you Arlene for a fascinating evening!

Martin Dawson

People are at the heart of politics – being on the campaign trail is a great reminder of that and I'm glad to be back on the trail for exactly that reason.

Meeting people, listening to and understanding their concerns and explaining how we, the Labour party, can help answer at least some of those concerns in the next European Parliament.

The next elections are first and foremost about our vision for Europe. This has been highlighted in the common manifesto the Labour party has signed with our socialist sister parties ([see pes.eu/en/news/pes-manifesto-adopted-clear-focus-job-creation](http://pes.eu/en/news/pes-manifesto-adopted-clear-focus-job-creation)).

The focus here is to put EU citizens at the centre of our policies. We need to create jobs and relaunch the economy in a way that benefits all – not in a way that leaves 27 million European's without a job. We need to ensure that there are fair rules within the single market; defending our workers and ensuring that their rights are not sold away.

We cannot let centre-right parties put in place a lopsided EU, devoid of social and consumer protection and environmental standards, amounting to no more than a free-for-all unregulated market.

Second, this election will also impact Britain's future relationship with the EU. UKIP want out. The Tories want halfway

out, with the promise of a referendum after Cameron "renegotiates" the UK's relationship with the EU and then have a take-it or leave-it in/out referendum.

There is nothing democratic about this. Cameron will be telling fellow EU members to reorganise themselves on his terms or else risk Britain leaving. And he will then tell the UK electorate to choose between his version of Europe or no Europe – with neither the status quo nor a different set of reforms being options. This strategy amounts to two rounds of blackmail. It won't work and could well aggravate Britain's perilous economic recovery if investors take fright at even the risk of Brexit.

We therefore have to make the case for Europe on the doorsteps and in debates. There are idealistic, pragmatic reasons for Europe, which we will rehearse, but there are also selfish ones. It is vital for Britain that we not only have access to the single European market but that we have a seat at the table where the common rules for the common market are thrashed out. Simply having free trade with Europe is not good enough. We need to be there to defend our interests.

If you want to come and lend a hand on the campaign trail in these all-important last weeks, do let me know: I would be delighted to have you on board.

Richard Corbett

The Brussels Labour Annual General Meeting elected a new Executive Committee at its meeting on Wednesday 18 March 2014.

Jo Wood, David O'Leary and Belinda Pyke were re-elected to their positions – respectively Chair, Vice-Chair and Treasurer. Isobel Findlay becomes Secretary. Paul Hagan was thanked for his service as Secretary in 2013–2014 and remains as a member of the Executive Committee.

Charlotte Billingham, Martin Dawson, Nicholas Elles, Keir Fitch and Maureen Hick also remain on

the committee.

Peter Wragg and Mike Ridgway agreed to keep their positions as auditors. The full list of the committee is available at brusselslabour.eu/about-us/executive-committee/

The full minutes of the AGM will be posted on the website in due course.

The AGM was followed by a discussion with Michael Cashman MEP and Caroline Flint MP, the Shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. A full report of this meeting appears on page 3 of this edition of *Germinal*.



**ON THE
CAMPAIGN
TRAIL WITH
RICHARD
CORBETT**

**ANNUAL
GENERAL
MEETING**

**NEW
EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE
ELECTED**

SISTER
PARTIESANNUAL
RECEPTION

WORKING TOGETHER AND WORKING HARD TO WIN THE TRUST OF EUROPE'S CITIZENS

17 sister parties participated in this year's annual reception in April. The event attracted over 400 people to the Residence Palace in Brussels.

The room was vibrantly decorated and many parties set up stands with publications and information on the parties and how to get involved with the campaign in Belgium and back home.

There was a real energy in the room. Many good old friends seeing each other again and many new friendships forged through the Socialist network.

Jo Wood from Brussels Labour introduced the event and welcomed the speakers.

Marie Arena (PS) opened the speeches and really motivated the audience. She made it clear *"there is an alternative Europe to that of austerity"* and defended worker's rights against social dumping.

Kathleen Van Brempt (sp.a) spoke on the need for *"social protection for a stronger EU and the need to invest in this."*

Martin Schulz, PES top candidate, in his speech spoke about how this election, like many others will be fought on emotion, and we need to engage with the human emotions of the people in order to win. He spoke about how we need to build trust and conviction in our arguments and that we certainly need a majority in the European Parliament to be able to realise what we promise.

Schulz's main policy proposal was *"taxes should be paid where profits are generated"*, speaking on the responsibility of the banks and



multinational companies who have made this crisis worse and it is the citizens who are paying for it.

Jutta Buyse (sp.a) asked a question to Martin Schulz at the end of his intervention, about what advice he would give to a running MEP candidate when knocking on doors during the campaign. His answer delivered 3 very clear messages and solutions on how to convince people that Socialists will deliver.

Unfortunately Jean-Pascal Labille, (PS) Federal Minister couldn't make it to speak that evening due to a hectic agenda for the three elections taking place in Belgium on 25 May. There will be Federal, Regional and European elections all on the same day.

On social media the #knockthevote campaign was championing and there was clear support from all those present for Martin Schulz as the PES top candidate.

Brussels Labour was the lead organiser, thanks go also to sp.a and PS.

Charlotte Billingham



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BRANCH MEETING

A MESSAGE FROM
CLAUDE MORAES
MEP

“It was a pleasure to speak to Brussels Labour about my report and the EP Inquiry on Mass Surveillance and the NSA.

It was just the kind of enjoyable, informed discussion you would expect from Brussels Labour – lots of interesting questions and a few about the European Election Campaign in the UK and how Brussels Labour members can participate.

A few post scripts to the discussion. Shortly, after our discussion the Labour Party formally changed its policy on the issue of scrutiny of our intelligence services and GCHQ calling for an overhaul and modernisation of arrangements. This was set out in a key note speech by Yvette Cooper which followed a narrative on a ‘digital bill of

rights’ which has included in Ed Miliband’s recent Young Lecture.

Along with the shift in policy from Nick Clegg (but not the Conservatives) it indicates what we discussed that evening, and the content of my report which was voted through in Plenary by a large majority. The small opposition included the ECR and UK Conservatives.

The future of civil liberties and human rights will include the protection of those rights in cyber space. Critically my report has implications for business where data transfers and e-commerce will require encryption, trust and regulation on privacy at a level not envisaged before. The idea of a ‘digital bill of rights’ or ‘digital habeas corpus’ first sets out in my draft report has been used widely in the UK and elsewhere in the EU.”

ANALYSIS
UKRAINE CRISIS
SHOWS UK
NEEDS EU

PATRICK COSTELLO
CO-AUTHOR,
‘OUR EUROPE,
NOT THEIR’
(Laurence & Wishart)

There is much talk these days of new cold wars. Last week, US President Obama used his public speech in Brussels to remind the world of the NATO commitments to mutual self-defence under Article 5 of its Treaty.

Without denying the importance of the security guarantees offered by NATO during this crisis, we risk overlooking that its origins was about not signing an EU Association Agreement at a summit in Vilnius last autumn.

The most important response to the referendum and subsequent annexation of the Crimea, has also been EU policy, namely a calibrated three-stage approach to sanctions, agreed by Heads of State and government on 6 March:

Stage 1, the suspension of bilateral negotiations on visas and for a new EU-Russia agreement, was implemented immediately on the announcement that morning of the rushed referendum.

Stage 2, targeted sanctions on individuals linked to the policies violating the territorial integrity of Ukraine, was implemented in response to the annexation of Crimea and

Stage 3, the big guns of economic sanctions, are in preparation in order to be ready to adopt should the Russians decide to escalate further by, for example, intervening in eastern Ukraine.

So why is the EU role so important?

Firstly because it is yet another demonstration that Britain’s influence in the world depends on its ability to shape EU policy. Ministers of our deeply Eurosceptic government, have suddenly been referring regularly to decisions we have taken “*with our European partners*”. Despite the constant stream of individual foreign ministers visiting Kiev, the value of what has been achieved has rested on EU unity.

Secondly, the maintenance of that EU unity is a sign of EU foreign policy coming of age. The differences of view and divisions between Member States have been well documented. However, when faced with the possibility of failure, agreements have been found, held to and implemented. The EU has come a long way since the divisions over war in Iraq and the break-up of Yugoslavia.

Finally, there is an important lesson for those of us in the Labour Party, which is that if our foreign policy proposals are to be realistic and effective, they will have to be implemented through the EU. Britain alone is simply no longer in a position to shape global events. It is, however, a powerful player in EU decision-making and the EU is shaping global events more and more, from Ukraine to Iran to the Western Balkans. It is time, then, for us to be realistic as a government in waiting about how we can achieve our foreign policy goals, and the EU is central to that.



**EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT
ELECTIONS
2014**



**PROGRESSIVE
RENAISSANCE
FOR EUROPE
FORUM**

FEPS organised the Progressive Renaissance for Europe forum in April.

It aimed to encourage citizens' participation in the European election debates and to promote political discussion, with all its close partners and members.

There were interactive debates, workshops, literature cafés and other side activities. Speakers included: Elio Di Rupo, Martin Schulz, Hannes Swoboda, Massimo D'Alema, Bruno Tobback, Kaisa Penny, Kathleen Van Brempt, Marie Arena, Pascal Lamy, Georges Dassis and many more...

The debate kicked off on the Thursday night with a conference format inspired by the TV show *Dragon's Den*, dubbed 'Renaissance spotlight'.

Five people had two minutes each to present their proposals to the leaders of what they want Progressive leaders to do after the European elections. The audience voted if it was good enough to be considered to take on board or not. For example, one proposal was to create a European minimum wage.

The Friday evening closed with a political event with the European and Belgian political stars. Elio di Rupo, Prime Minister of Belgium closed his speech by saying "Our destiny is European, we need more Europe".

Bruno Tobback, the leader of sp.a said "A

different, more Social Europe is possible". Martin Schulz closed the day's debates by stating that "We can only change Europe if the people believe that we are listening and that we will act".

Saturday gathered together FEPS Young Academics Network and the Young European Socialists (YES) for a full day of debates under the title 'Renaissance spotlight on youth: the Europe we want to create'. Open and interactive debates were held based around the papers which the Young Academics had produced during this year's cycle.

From the UK, speakers included representatives from the Policy Network, the Fabian Society and Richard Corbett. Roger Liddle presented his latest book, 'The Europe Dilemma: Britain and the Drama of EU Integration'.

There was an interesting, even heated panel debate between him and Bernard Guetta, the French author of *'Intime conviction'*, whether other Europeans want the UK in or out of the EU.

The whole event brought in over 1000 people into the lively, interactive discussions. #FEPS_Renaissance was trending second on twitter in Belgium, and the debates truly put forward a progressive Renaissance for Europe.

For more information go to renaissance-europe.eu.

Charlotte Billingham

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Martin Dawson

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FUTURE EVENTS

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 May

Campaign weekend in Yorkshire and the Humber

For more information call Jo Wood on +32 (0)475 37 00 80 or Nick Elles on +32 (0) 470 93 67 39, or send an email to campaigns@brusselslabour.eu

Wednesday 14 May – 19:30

Branch meeting with Jutta Buyse (sp.a candidate for the European Parliament election)

FEPS, Rue Montoyer 40, Brussels

Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 May

Campaign weekend with PS and sp.a

More information to follow via email

Thursday 22 to Sunday 25 May European Parliament elections

To vote in the UK you need to register by Wednesday 7 May at 17:00 BST – more info at aboutmyvote.co.uk/register.

Tuesday 17 June

Summer social

More information to follow via email