



# **GERMINAL**

**Brussels Labour: International  
Branch of the British Labour Party**

**December 2018**



# Labour Party Conference



I was lucky enough to be one of two Brussels Labour members who were elected by Labour International as delegates to this year's Labour Party Conference.

While Brexit was a big issue at conference last year, it was nothing compared to this year, held just six months before the UK is scheduled to leave the EU. Although Conference heard a range of motions, the Brexit one undoubtedly caused a stir. From a delegate meeting to agree on the exact wording of a motion for a public vote on Brexit after so many CLPs submitted motions concerning this, to Keir

Starmer telling Conference that he believed Remain should be an option in any public vote, it was clear that nobody was happy with the costly, chaotic Brexit Theresa May is trying to force upon the country.

Walking to the conference venue, I was greeted by various anti-Brexit groups formed by people of varying positions on the political compass. As I flicked through the conference guide, I realized it was going to be quite a task to attend all the Brexit fringe events, not least because there were multiple ones happening at the same time. I think this really showed the urgency Labour party members feel regarding Brexit.



The Brussels Labour event at Conference, Where Next for Labour in Europe, was well attended, and it was an opportunity to hear from a range of speakers we do not always have the chance to see speak. Alongside Richard Corbett and Clare Moody, we heard from Rupa Huq, Brendan Howlin and Olivia Bailey, and I was able to talk to members of the Labour party from the UK about what Brussels Labour does.

Although it was difficult to do so, I was pleased I managed to find time to attend some fringe events not related to Brexit. Labour Party Conference is a great opportunity to reignite passion for certain topics and discover and get involved in great campaigns and initiatives. I heard Luciana Berger MP and others speak about mental health and local governments, as well as Stella Creasy and others talk about violence against women activists.

Overall, conference was a great opportunity and I would thoroughly recommend the experience to anyone that hasn't been and encourage those who have to go again. When I went this year, I really expected it to be the last conference before Brexit, but with Labour passing a motion calling for a general election or a people's vote, and with the events of the past few weeks, I'm not so sure.

# Ypres

Brussels Labour organized a trip to Ypres this year, 100 years since the end of World War One.

Living in Belgium gives one a different perspective of the events of the First World War to that one acquires in the UK, even now, in commemorations, there is a different memory.

Belgium was invaded on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, an action which prompted Britain to join the war, following an agreement from 1839 to protect Belgium in the event of war. Ypres remained a strategic location during the war, and was the site of many battles, including the Battle of Passchendaele. However, it was also one of the sites that hosted an unofficial Christmas Truce between soldiers.

We'd especially like to thank Paul Hagan for organizing this trip.

## Place Jo Cox



On 27th September, the city of Brussels honoured the memory of murdered Labour MP Jo Cox, by naming a square beside the Ancienne Belgique music venue she often visited in the years she lived here, as Place Jo Cox, in a formal ceremony.

We heard from different speakers during the ceremony, including Jeremy Corbyn, and Jo Cox's sister, who gave an incredibly moving speech to those gathered.

Also speaking was Richard Corbett, leader of UK Labour MEPs, which was fitting as Jo Cox spent

some time working in Brussels, and in the European Parliament.

He said to those gathered, "All of us were very touched when we heard of the decision of the City of Brussels to name this square after Jo Cox. The gesture will live on for many years, reminding us of the values she stood for, and of her time in Brussels, in the European Parliament.

Many of us remember how enthusiastic and lively she was, and the commitment she gave to everything she did. It was a privilege to work in the vicinity of her, let alone closely with her. I think for many of us, not just in our political family, but of course, especially in our political family, our hearts were torn apart when we heard the terrible news that day, just a few days before we voted in that terrible referendum in which she was campaigning to remain part of our European Union.

But we must take courage. We must live up to the values that she stood for, live up to the principles that she lived by. We must fight on for the politics that we believe in, which will make our society a better place. We must create a better world, where people all take to their hearts the words of Jo that are so widely remembered, "we have more in common than that which divides us."



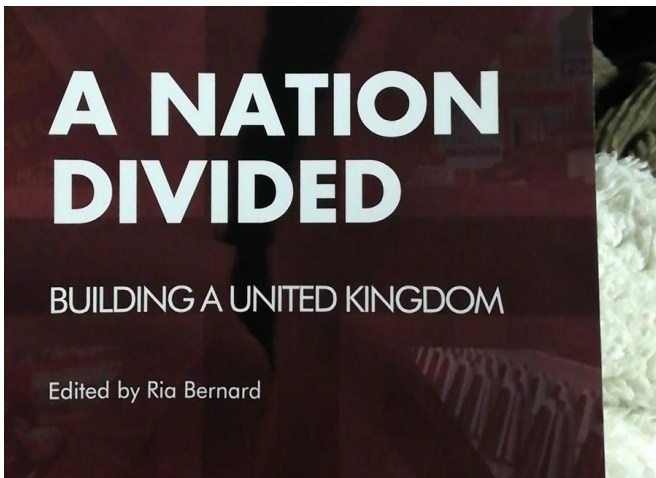
# Local Elections

We had two Brussels Labour executive members running in the local elections; Jo Wood in the City of Brussels, and Keir Fitch in Etterbeek. Though neither won a seat, they both ran great campaigns and we would like to thank everyone who showed up to support them.

We were pleased to see PS win in the City of Brussels with Philippe Close as mayor. However, for the rest of Brussels and Belgium we need to ensure that the PS and SP.A stay strong, particularly in the approach to the European elections. On the left, the greens made gains, whilst the far-right, though far from a successful night, did win the commune of Ninove.



# Young Fabians



Over the past six months, one of our members has been researching and writing a section of a pamphlet for the Young Fabians, which was launched in Westminster in November.

Imogen Tyreman was one of a number of other Young Fabians selected to contribute to the pamphlet *A Nation Divided: Building a United Kingdom*, which addressed a range of divisions in UK society, including regional divisions, socio-economic divisions, and immigration and integration.

These all played a part in bringing Brexit about, particularly by contributing to a feeling of being left-behind that many experienced across the UK. The Young Fabians provided insight into this, and came up with a number of policy recommendations to remedy certain situations.

Imogen wrote for a chapter on intergenerational inequality, looking primarily at the welfare state and imbalances in voting weight. One focus of her research was divisions created between young and old by the EU referendum. Not only did the vote highlight key differences in the way people view the EU, it was also the result of a gamble by Cameron to win back voters, particularly the elderly, who were deserting the Conservative party for UKIP.

As well as this, she believes that whilst there remains an imbalance in voting weight, down in part to the sheer size of the baby boomer generation, it will remain difficult for young people to have their voices heard. For this reason, one of her recommendations was to lower the voting age at 16 and introduce political education into the curriculum, to ensure that politicians appeal to all generations in their policies and campaigns.

# Pub Quiz

## Brussels Labour Pub Quiz

James Joyce Pub, Rue Archimède 34, 1000

21 Nov., 7pm

Prizes for  
Raffle  
Entry: €20 per team of four  
Proceeds to Brussels Labour



Icons made by Freepik from www.flaticon.com

We had a great time at the James Joyce for our annual pub quiz. Questions provided by the executive committee proved challenging at times, but we had some great performances. Winning the night was Chaos with Ed Miliband.

We are happy to announce that the quiz raised £460 and we look forward to seeing you again next year.

Thanks to all those who came.

## GMB

The GMB Brussels Branch has been quite active since the last newsletter. Many of our members went to Labour Party Conference, so we organized a meeting with Paul Maloney, Regional Secretary of GMB Southern Region. Paul later came to meet with the branch and with MEPs in Brussels.

As Brexit approaches, we continue to think about the future of the branch, as it will be significantly smaller, but we hope it can continue in some way with those who remain in Brussels.

Finally, we have elected two branch members to go to Congress next year, Shamik Das and Imogen Tyreman.



## Branch Meetings

We have been lucky enough to hear from some excellent speakers so far this year on a range of topics, mostly related to different areas of Brexit. Ahead of the Council meeting in October, Richard Corbett, leader of the EPLP, came to give us his view on Brexit.

We have also done a lot as a branch, including organising people to go on People's Vote marches both in London and in Brussels. In November, some of our members went to a rally at Schuman along with anti-Brexit campaigner Andrew Andonis, who came over to make a last stand against the agreement.



# People's Vote March

*Rosemary Hindle*



Brussels Labour members joined 700,000 people in London to march for a People's Vote to Stop Brexit on 20 October.

The third anti-Brexit march this year, it was by far the most well-attended as the Brexit process entered the final few months. As the negotiations for Britain's departure from the EU on 29 March 2019 began to reach a climax, attention was also turning to the "Meaningful Vote" in the House of Commons where MPs will have to decide whether or not to ratify the final Withdrawal Agreement between the United Kingdom and the EU. The march aimed to put pressure on MPs to legislate to allow the British people to have their say on the final deal when it finally comes before Parliament.

The biggest demonstration in London since 2003, Brussels Labour members joined up with the Labour 'bloc' to show the opposition to Brexit which also exists in the Labour movement. The total number of marchers far exceeded the expectations of the organisers and the police, and it took our group almost five hours to walk from our starting point in Park Lane to Trafalgar Square – by that time the rally in Parliament Square was long over, even if we'd been able to walk down Westminster to get there. Never have so many European flags been seen in London, as people not only protested against Brexit but also marched to show their support for the European project and appreciation of the benefits of working together with our European neighbours through the European Union.

The Withdrawal Agreement has now reached Parliament, and all eyes will be on the Commons on 11 December when the Meaningful Vote finally takes place. We will only know then if the march, and the different campaigns to stop Brexit have had an effect, and if a "People's Vote" on the deal with an option to remain will be allowed to take place. However, whatever happens, it is clear that in one of the most Eurosceptic EU member states, a large pro-European movement has been borne, which will fight to stay as close as possible to the EU, regardless of the outcome of the vote on 11 December.

# Executive Committee: Brussels Labour

David Earnshaw – Chair

Jo Wood

Imogen Tyreman – Vice-Chair

Tom Fillis

Rosemary Hindle – Secretary

Simon Budden

Jos Gallacher —Treasurer

Isobel Findlay

Keir Fitch

## Upcoming Meetings

**An email will be sent round in January confirming the first meeting.**

**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from Brussels Labour!**

## Membership payments

To confirm your membership of Brussels Labour as well as to the Labour Party, you need to pay a small additional subscription.

Unlike constituency Labour parties in the UK, Brussels Labour is entirely self-funding, so to help support our activities members are asked to pay an annual fee of 25 euro (waged) or 5 euro (unwaged/stagiaires).

It's easy to forget if you've paid or not—if you are unsure get in contact with Sue at

[membership@brusselslabour.eu](mailto:membership@brusselslabour.eu)

She can send you through the correct bank details or collect payment at a meeting.

## Online

**Website:**  
[brusselslabour.eu](http://brusselslabour.eu)

**Twitter**  
[@brusselslabour](https://twitter.com/brusselslabour)

**Facebook**  
[Facebook.com/brusselslabour.eu](https://www.facebook.com/brusselslabour.eu)

**Email**  
[secretary@brusselslabour.eu](mailto:secretary@brusselslabour.eu)