



# **GERMINAL**

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

**July 2019**



# John Fitzmaurice Lecture



“To create, by establishing an economic community, the basis for a broader and deeper community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts; and to lay the foundations for institutions which will give direction to a destiny henceforward shared.”

This is just part of the preamble to the Treaty Establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, signed in Paris in 1951. The preamble itself is worth reading in full, which is exactly what Lord Andrew Adonis did when he gave the annual John Fitzmaurice lecture in February this year.

While many of us do not need reminding of reasons to continue to fight to remain part of the EU, hearing this certainly revitalised our spirits as we approached the dreaded 29 March deadline.

Brussels Labour were pleased to be able to welcome Lord Adonis as our speaker in this year’s John Fitzmaurice lecture. Adonis is no stranger to Brussels. Members who have attended rallies at Schuman may well have spotted him there.

Given the proximity to our expected departure of the EU, this year’s theme was an obvious choice, and Adonis spoke to us at length about the EU referendum, the forces behind it, and the future.

A whistle-stop tour of British history in the EU demonstrated the changing nature of the relationship between the UK and the EU. Adonis was able to conjure up a nostalgia for a forgotten past. This wasn’t the faux past that populists lament losing, but the late 70s and early 80s, when Britain was not just part of the EU but a leader, on a civilising and democratic mission, looking for opportunities not threats.

We also got a view of Adonis’ own character and politics beyond Brexit. He quoted extensively from Roy Jenkins’ diaries with references to his time in Brussels, giving the audience a good laugh as they recognised familiar places and events.

Looking to what might happen next, Adonis spoke of the ‘Sherlock Holmes principle’; once all impossible options are eliminated, we are forced to have hope. In the end, many left this year’s John Fitzmaurice lecture with a bit more optimism about the future.

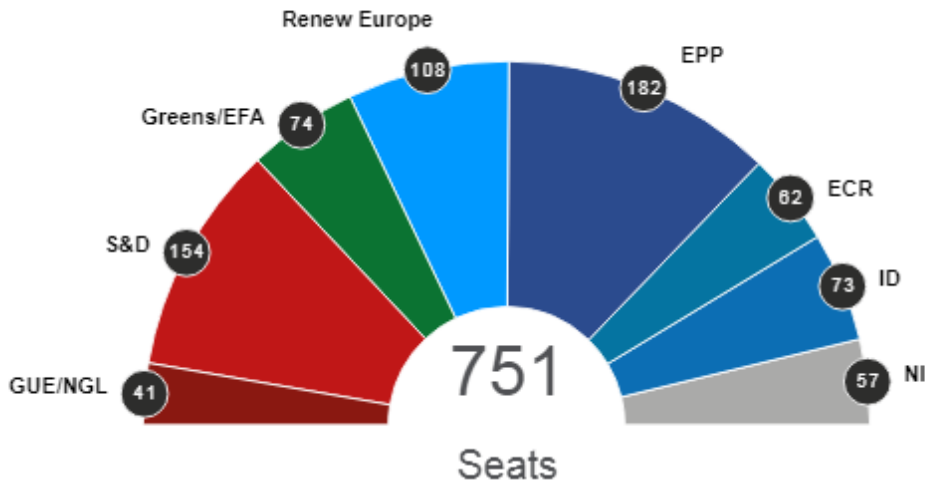
## About the John Fitzmaurice Lecture

John Fitzmaurice was an administrator, academic and writer, and a founding father of Brussels Labour. He was an author of numerous books and articles on politics, as well as an official at the European Commission and a lecturer at the Université Libre de Bruxelles.

In memory of John, and his unique contribution to democracy, socialism and Europe, Brussels Labour established an annual lecture around these themes, inviting a leading figure from the Left in Europe.

Neil Kinnock gave the inaugural lecture in October 2004, and since then we have welcomed a number of distinguished speakers from British and European politics.

# May Branch Meeting



We held our meeting in May on the first Wednesday after the European elections, giving us an obvious topic of discussion. Rather than invite in external speakers, we decided to use the expertise already present in our executive committee, with Frazer Clarke and David Earnshaw giving an overview of the elections and taking questions from members.

It was easy for many of us to feel pessimistic about the elections. Although many excellent Labour MEPs were elected, including one new face, there was almost an equal number who sadly lost their seats.

Meanwhile, both the Brexit Party and the Liberal Democrats successfully portrayed this vote as a proxy second referendum, with themselves as the parties of Leave and Remain respectively. Despite the issue of a second referendum not being an EU competence, this was still a successful strategy for these elections, with the Brexit Party winning 29 seats, and the Liberal Democrats 15.

However, things look more positive for us at European level. The Socialists and Democrats remain the second largest party, with 154 MEPs. At the time of the meeting, it also still seemed possible that Frans Timmermans could be nominated as the next Commission President.

Unfortunately, since the meeting, the outlook has changed. Last week, the European Council not only chose not to nominate Timmermans as the next Commission President, but decided against nominating any of the lead candidates of the political groups. Instead, they nominated Ursula von der Leyen, German defense minister, for the top job.

This decision has been presented as a victory for either Macron or for Orban, depending on your source. However, whoever engineered this, the rest of the council approved it, save for Angela Merkel, who abstained. This could cause difficulties for the lead candidate process in the next elections. Of course, it is not a done deal; the European Parliament will decide whether to approve von der Leyen later this month.

In this meeting, we also discussed a branch submission to the National Policy Forum. The discussion was led by Jos Gallacher, who is the Labour International CLP representative on the National Policy Forum. Jos proposed a submission to the economy, business and trade commission, which is currently consulting on democratic public ownership.

There were lots of excellent ideas from members in the meeting. If you'd like to find out more about the National Policy Forum or this particular submission, don't hesitate to get in touch with the executive committee.

# June Branch Meeting



Brussels Labour was delighted to welcome newly elected Jackie Jones MEP to speak at our June branch meeting. Jackie was elected in May as the Labour Party MEP for Wales. Since there is now unfortunately no Labour MEP in Scotland, Jackie is the only Labour MEP of a devolved region in the UK.

Prior to her election, Jackie taught law at Cardiff Law School at Cardiff University. She then taught at Bristol Law School, University of the West of England, where she was Professor of Feminist Legal Studies. Jackie is active in the voluntary sector on Wales on human rights for many years.

As such, it is fitting that she will now be working on both the legal affairs (JURI) and women's rights and gender equality (FEMM) committees in the European Parliament.

It was refreshing to hear from a new voice at the branch meeting, and members were eager to hear more about Jackie's plans for her time in Brussels, whether that be a few months or a few years. Brussels Labour hopes we will hear more from Jackie Jones in the near future and looks forward to having her as a Labour MEP.

# July Branch Meeting

In July, we held a reconvened AGM to elect the executive committee and to align new rules from Labour International with the Brussels Labour constitution. A number of amendments to the constitution were proposed and agreed upon, details of which were sent by email to Labour International members in Belgium.

As well as a new committee, members of which are listed at the end of the Germinal, we also elected three members as full delegates to the Labour International General Committee, and two members who will job-share this position. We also re-elected auditors.

The new committee looks forward to the coming year. The next meeting will be in September.

# Labour International

Since the last edition of the *Geminal*, Labour International have elected a new executive committee. The new committee took up their positions on 28th April and will stay in post until 2021. The position of BAME officer remains vacant, so it is still open for nominations. As the committee is one woman short of the 50% women quota, this post must be filled by a woman.

The first General Committee meeting was held in June. While all members are welcome to attend and speak, only branch delegates can vote in these meetings. Among other things, the meeting agreed on nominations to the Conference Arrangements Committee and the National Constitutional Committee.

The next meeting is on 21st July from 14:00 to 15:30 CEST. If you are interested in joining, please get in touch with one of the Brussels Labour executive committee members or directly with Labour International, who can send you the link to the meeting.

Labour International have also chosen their delegates for conference this year. The majority of delegates are from EU countries, including two from Belgium – Imogen Tyreman and Colin O’Driscoll. But, this year we also have one delegate from Turkey, and another from the USA.

## A new Brexit policy

In September last year, Labour Party Conference agreed on a motion that stated: “If we cannot get a general election Labour must support all options remaining on the table, including campaigning for a public vote.” Yet, despite failing to win a vote of no confidence in the government that would have secured a general election, Labour’s position on a public vote has remained ambiguous.

On Monday 8 July this changed. Labour announced a clear shift in its Brexit policy, with calls for the next Tory leader to hold another referendum on their deal, which could be ‘no deal’, if Johnson stands by what he’s been advocating recently, or Remain. In these circumstances, Labour would campaign to Remain.

This approach might not come as a total surprise to many of us. Labour has always been opposed to no-deal, and to a Tory deal that threatens jobs, living standards, and our open, multicultural society. However, there were certainly times, such as when Labour set out its compromise plan for talks with the Conservatives, where it was uncertain whether we would end up enabling such a Brexit.

Of course, the question remains of what Labour would do if there is a general election. Reports on Monday stated that Labour would aim to negotiate a new deal with the EU that respects the Brexit vote. However, any final deal would then be put to the people, with a choice between this deal and Remain.

In these circumstances, the Labour position would depend on the deal negotiated. Given that it’s clear to many of us that any Brexit deal will leave the country worse off no matter who it is negotiated by, we might hope that Labour would campaign to Remain. Yet, campaigning against their own deal could be a difficult position to defend.

Nevertheless, Labour gaining power in a general election remains the best chance of securing a people’s vote, given that both Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt are unlikely to agree to such a demand. In any case, as the official opposition, Labour’s announcement is welcome in adding another voice to this important campaign.

# Thank You



Most of us did not expect to be taking part in the European elections this year. The UK was supposed to have left the EU by the 29 March 2019; the MEPs of the last mandate were going to be our last. So, the fact the UK will still be a member of the EU until at least the end of October and was still able to take part in the European elections seemed like a gift.

But fighting elections doesn't necessarily mean winning elections, and unfortunately this was the case in May. No doubt many of us have opinions about the whys and hows of Labour's performance on polling day, but we should not allow this to dominate our thinking and forget the fantastic MEPs who were not re-elected.

As well as their parliamentary roles, which of course demonstrated to Eurosceptics the impact British representatives can have in the EU, Labour MEPs in the last mandate had the extra job of campaigning to remain during the referendum. After the UK voted to Leave, there was no more 'business as usual', and many of the MEPs continued campaigns to Remain in the EU with calls for a public vote.

Brussels Labour was lucky to welcome a number of the Labour MEPs in the last mandate as speakers at our branch meetings and to work with them for events at Labour Party Conference. As a branch, we were sorry to hear that some of them will not be returning to Brussels, and so we would like to extend our thanks to Paul Brannen, Wajid Khan, Alex Mayer, Clare Moody and Sion Simon.

As the longest serving British MEP, and the second longest serving MEP in the entire European Parliament, we would also like to thank David Martin for all his hard work over the past 35 years, and wish him the best in his future roles.

As well as those who were not re-elected, Brussels Labour would like to thank all the UK Labour MEPs who served in the last mandate, including those who did not restand and those who left to pursue other areas.

# Executive Committee: Brussels Labour

David Earnshaw – Chair

Jo Wood

Imogen Tyreman – Vice-Chair

Tom Fillis

Rosemary Hindle – Secretary

Frazer Clarke

Jos Gallacher —Treasurer

Isobel Findlay

Keir Fitch

Charlotte Billingham

## Upcoming Events

The next branch meeting will be in September.

21-25 September:  
Labour Party  
Conference, Brighton

12<sup>th</sup> October: People's  
Vote march in London

## 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 us at [membership@brusselslabour.eu](mailto:membership@brusselslabour.eu)

## Online

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