



Germinal

The Brussels Labour International Branch newsletter

May 2009

Every vote counts to back Labour and stop the BNP



**European elections
4-7 June 2009**

Imagine a Britain where no-one is entitled to paid holidays, part-time workers have no rights, agency workers have no protection and maternity rights depend on the generosity of your employer. No sane political party would campaign on such a platform. Or would they?

David Cameron has one European policy: withdrawal from the Social Chapter, which the incoming Labour government adopted in 1997. This gave workers new legal rights, such as four weeks paid holiday a year. By taking Britain out, Cameron would turn the clock back to the bad old days. Despite the window dressing, the Tories are still fiercely anti-European. This stems from their obsession with an utterly free market, unfettered by the kind of social and environmental protection that is central to Europe's social market model.

This is the battleground for the European Elections this June. And the dividing lines are clear. A fair and just society with Labour. Weaker social and environmental standards under the Tories. Since the last Euros in 2004, a right-wing majority has dominated the European Parliament. The conservative right has constantly frustrated our fight for progressive policies, such as opposing better health and safety laws and improved rights for women. Tory MEPs even voted against greater energy efficiency!

Despite this, we have enjoyed successes. The Socialist Group has pushed through important social protection measures,

placed the fight against fuel poverty centre-stage and helped to forge a new deal for agency workers. Above all, the Socialist Group has forced the European Commission to table proposals for a new social agenda.

And just imagine the boost David Cameron would get in the UK from a strong performance in the European elections. The Tories would use that as a springboard for the next General Election. That's why we need to stop them in their tracks in June.

As well as the Tories and Lib Dems, we'll also be fighting the far-right BNP and under the proportional representation system for the European elections, every vote counts. In the North West region, the BNP only need about 8% of the vote to win a seat. In 2004, the BNP took 6.4% in the North West. That would mean money, power and influence - and huge damage to Britain. If people don't vote in these elections, the BNP will win a seat. That is why members need to come out fighting.

In these elections, Every Vote Counts, please do everything you can to maximise voter turn-out and ensure that we return Labour MEPs and committed trade unionists to the European Parliament in June. MEPs committed to fighting racism and fascism in all its forms and to promoting a fair, inclusive and just socialist agenda.



Theresa Griffin

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land**

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Editorial

Thank you to all those who have contributed to the last edition of *Germinal* before the European elections. We have had some very interesting speakers over the last few weeks and it has been a privilege to hear from those who are standing this time round.

We have also looked back over the past few years and had strident discussions about how the Labour MEPs of the future can wield increased power in a changing European Parliament.

If you would like to write an article for *Germinal*, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Brussels Labour Exec - all ideas are welcome!

**Emma Eatwell
Editor**

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Ed. Resp.: Emma Eatwell

Campaigning for Labour in Europe



After 5 years working in Brussels, I re-entered street politics when I moved back to London. It was great to get out and about, learning about my new community and seeing the very real difference that Labour policies make. From a policing strategy that responds to community concerns, to the massive injection of cash which new deal for communities and the decent homes strategy has given some of our most deprived neighbourhoods. It was a stark contrast to European politics, where the impact of the changes to laws is less immediate and can be harder to measure.

However, when the opportunity arose to stand in the European elections, it seemed like the perfect time to bring my knowledge of European politics down to street level. Recently I have spoken to a huge

number of Constituency Labour Parties and it has been refreshing to find out that whilst most members assume they know little about Europe, the reality is different.

Activists are also motivated to campaign in this election. The need for strong Labour representation in the European Parliament is fully understood and a hectic schedule of campaigning events is being put together.

Whilst the connections between our local, London-wide, national and European politics are not always made, things have improved greatly. This is the first European election I have fought where I sense that

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Anne Fairweather campaigning with the PPC for Streatham, Chuka Umunna



the population recognises that we cannot be an island and that we need to cooperate with our neighbours.

This election is the perfect opportunity to show the difference that a strong Labour voice in the European Parliament can make to people's daily lives. Come and join me on the campaign trail.

Anne Fairweather
Labour Candidate for the European Elections in London

UK registration



Registration for the European elections in Belgium has now closed, but if you have been registered to vote in the UK within the last 15 years you can still participate in the European Elections in the UK.

Remember, in PR elections every vote really does count! In case you need to re-register - you have until 19 May to sign up - go to <http://is.gd/vgUu>.

If you don't have internet access ring your local authority in the UK and ask to speak to someone in their Electoral Services Office.

Campaigning in Brussels and London

BRUSSELS

During the next Day of Action (9 May) the **sp.a (Flemish Socialists)** will campaign on 'Social Europe' at the Open Days of the European Institutions, close to the European Parliament.

The event will be held between 13:00 and 17:00, and Said El Khadraoui MEP and Anne Van Lancker MEP will join between 13:30 and 14:30.

Flyers will be handed out in Dutch, French and English. For more information, contact Ans Persoons on 0498 79 28 96.

The **Party of European Socialists** is arranging numerous events: see <http://elections2009.pes.org>

On Saturday 2 May, from 20:00 - 06:00, the **PS (Francophone Socialists)** will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Fete du Progrès at Botanique, St-Josse.

More details at www.feteduprogres.be

LONDON

Brussels Labour members will be joining forces on Sunday 17 May with Claude Moraes MEP and London Labour Party activists to campaign in key areas of North London (handily placed for those travelling via Eurostar!). The campaigning will start at 11:00 and last two to three hours.

If you are interested, contact Belinda Pyke at belinda.pyke@skynet.be.

Cornflakes, saunas, famous faces and enlargement: Gary Titley's 20 years in the EP

At its AGM on 18 March, Brussels Labour bid a fond farewell to Gary Titley, who has been an MEP for twenty years and is standing down from the European Parliament in June.

During his time as the longest serving leader of the European Parliamentary Labour Party (no mean feat!), Gary has been a good friend of Brussels Labour, regularly speaking at branch meetings, encouraging our participation in conference and drawing the party's attention to our existence!

In an often light hearted look back at his career in the European Parliament, Gary reflected on some of the lessons he had learned and lessons that need to be learned for the future.

Number 1 - Never be on time and always ask for the floor at the beginning of the debate (if not before)!

Number 2 - Beware of David Harley bearing (vodka) gifts.

Number 3 - Enlargement has been a success - peace and democracy should never be taken for granted.

Number 4 - The European Parliament has increased its power significantly (this is where the Cornflakes fit in). The EP needs to exercise that power responsibly.

Number 5 - MEPs need to be able to speak to the electorate - the European electoral system in the UK makes this more difficult.

Number 6 - Globalisation is the EU's last great chance to show its purpose.

Gary rounded up with his thoughts on the impending European elections, particularly the threat of the BNP in his home region of the North West, and urged Brussels Labour members to vote, and campaign where they were able to do so.

Brussels Labour hopes that Gary will continue to be a good friend and wishes him every success in the next chapter of his life.

Sarah Millar

Robert Evans and Eluned Morgan

Robert and Eluned kindly agreed to speak to Brussels Labour on 11 February. They stand down at the next election and treated us to a very entertaining trip down memory lane, with stories of the people that they have worked with over the years.

Both Robert and Eluned gave colourful accounts of some of the situations in which they have found themselves, from before they were elected to more recent times as the EP has evolved over the years.

Robert and Eluned also regaled with stories of Nana Miskouri, François Mitterand and Tony Blair and ended by telling the audience what they would and wouldn't miss when they stand down in June.

The two MEPs sparked off each other during the entire evening, with their quick, sharp and funny trips down memory lane, it was a thoroughly memorable evening and Brussels Labour will certainly miss them.

Emma Eatwell



Obituary: Jack Jones, 1913-2009

It was with great sadness that Brussels Labour learned of the recent death of Jack Jones, former leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union and veteran of the Spanish Civil War. He was 96.

As a young man he fought against the Fascist Blackshirts in Liverpool and took to socialism after reading "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist" by Robert Tressell. In the T&G he rose from shop steward to General Secretary. The last of his generation of powerful Union bosses, Jack was held responsible by some in the Labour Party for being "the union leader

that created the winter of discontent."

But that belittles his record. Jack was a key figure in keeping the trade union movement and the Labour Party together. He was one of those responsible for putting together the "social contract" between the Labour government and the Unions in the 1970s; and supported the government's anti-inflation policies in 1976, including the £6-a-week pay limit.

He was a passionate advocate of industrial democracy, believing that workers had the right to a greater say in all matters affecting their lives. Jack was also instrumental

in the creation of the Advisory, Conciliation, and Arbitration Service (ACAS). In retirement he campaigned for the National Pensioners' Convention.

He also campaigned for Britain to leave the EEC in the 1975 referendum, but that didn't stop him accepting my invitation to speak to Brussels Labour when I was Chair. He captivated his audience with stories about his life and uncompromising internationalism.

Peter Wragg



Transatlantic cooperation to fight climate change

Hot on the heels of Barack Obama's inauguration, Brussels Labour and Democrats Abroad hosted a lively joint debate on climate change on 28 January. The meeting was addressed by Dr Stephan Singer, Director of Global Energy Policy at WWF, and Democrats Abroad Speaker Sandrine Dixson-Declève, the Executive Director of International Sustainable Energy Exchange.

The speakers assessed the range of responses to the threat of climate change, from emissions trading, carbon tax and the role of industry in fostering cleaner and greener innovation both in the EU and the developing world, to the thorny issues of nuclear and renewables and EU trade barriers on energy-efficient products.

Stephan Singer drew on his experiences of the current UN negotiations in contrasting the faltering ambition of the EU with the growing commitment of others, namely the Obama administration's plan to stabilise emissions at 1990 levels by 2020.

Whereas on the EU side much of the previously-agreed 20% target cut in emissions remains to be achieved, the new President's inaugural speech, in which he stated the aim to put a million hybrid cars on the road, improve fuel efficiency standards and invest in solar and second-generation biofuels were cited by Sandrine Dixson-Declève as evidence of a more forward-looking stance of the new administration.

So, is the EU still a leader on climate change? The consensus was that European

governments could do better. In this context, both speakers argued that in the light of the financial crisis the 'green' paradigm is much more politically expedient for the new US administration, since EU industry has managed to convince governments and citizens that EU's greenness was part of the problem, rather than the solution.

Now more than ever innovative solutions are needed to kick start jobs and growth and the greater focus of the US administration on investing in R&D and new technologies was felt to be a sound approach.

As Stephan Singer explained, for Social Democrats the twin crises of climate change and the near collapse of the financial system are symptoms of a global social crisis. Any fixes must therefore take into account a social dialogue with trade unions and other stakeholders about adapting to new technologies.

Political leaders in the EU need to be clearer that energy intensive industries are not always labour intensive and so a switch to newer technologies accompanied by an investment incapacity building could boost employability both in the EU and the developing world.

Asked about the place of nuclear and renewables in the energy mix, views were more divisive: Singer pointed out nuclear is not considered a cheap option citing the expense of building and maintaining the plants so that emerging powers such as China and India are not building nuclear.



Sandrine Dixson-Declève took the opposite view: renewables are simply not yet competitive renewables and may conversely bolster the oil market since renewables cannot take up the shortfall in our insatiable demand for energy.

It was clear from the discussion that there is no easy and quick solution to ending our dependence on fossil fuels, not least as long as EU Member States remain divided on energy policies and preferences.

Nevertheless the recent convergence of transatlantic approaches to this issue may yet prove decisive in helping EU and US policy makers jointly navigate the multiple crises confronting them, avoiding temptations to protectionist and nationalist approaches to an issue requiring global solutions.

Jacqui Hale

Brussels Labour Executive Committee meets Harriet Harman

The Brussels Labour Executive Committee was invited to a brief private meeting with Harriet Harman whilst she was over to meet the EPLP in February.

The main discussion was about the forthcoming elections and the fact that the Labour Party does not want to separate out the European elections from the local elections on 4th June, as most voters do not make the distinction when they go to the polls.

The Exec told Harriet about the activities we

are planning around the elections – voter registration possibilities, contributions to MEPs campaign funds in the UK and planned trips to campaign once the season starts.

The Exec also highlighted a number of challenges that face Labour Party members who live abroad, such as the issue of disenfranchisement for UK citizens who have been living outside of the UK for over 15 years and the difficulties of entering a non-UK postcode in the Labour Party website!



Building a strong Labour voice in the next European Parliament



Eight weeks ahead of the European Parliament elections, Glenis Willmott, leader of the European Parliamentary Labour Party, presented her views on the upcoming vote and

her plans for the next parliament.

Glenis acknowledged that there is a lack of engagement on the part of the general public with regard to the European election and the Parliament in general. However, the public is now beginning to realise that the important political issues of

the day can only be addressed by working together. This should be the message that MEPs convey during the election campaign.

For Labour, it has been a trying time: the G20 brought renewed credibility and plaudits for Gordon Brown; days later, the revelations of plans devised within Number 10 for smear campaigns against senior Conservatives brought the Party - and Brown - back down again.

Nevertheless, Labour's election planning has improved. Even if this is seen by some only as a dry run for the general election, a greater engagement by ministers will be a boost to Labour's candidates in June.

For this election, the whole of 'Team Labour' would need to be engaged and mobilised, although MPs in particular need to remember the idiosyncrasies of these polls, where the Conservatives are not necessarily the main opponent.

Indeed, Glenis argued that in this 'unpredictable' election other parties can form a greater and unexpected challenge: five years ago, the presence of Robert Kilroy-Silk on the UKIP lists 'skewed' the election. Now, the splits on the anti-European Right - and the rise of the British National Party - present a new challenge. The threat of the BNP, she argued, should be overstated: the party is coming second in a number of wards and is on the brink of a breakthrough in many regions. People need to be made aware of the real threat posed by the BNP, and that only by voting Labour can its rise be prevented.

Overall, Glenis' message was that the Party at all levels, from ministers to activists, needs to pull together, work as a team, and return more Labour MEPs in the next Parliament.

David O'Leary

Introducing FEPS

The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) was established over a year ago. Members of FEPS are foundations and think tanks that belong to the Labour, Socialist and Social-democratic movement such as the Fabian Society in the UK and the Jean-Jaurès Foundation in France.



The recent creation of European think tanks responds to the need to connect the European Union with national think tanks in EU Member States. On a European level, our role is to break the Brussels-centric image of EU affairs and to "bridge the gap" between citizens and the EU institutions. We aim to foster a discussion that goes beyond national interest by connecting national and European debates, rather than opposing them.

Close to the Party of European Socialists,



Ernst Stetter, Secretary General
Photo: Thomas Delsol

but remaining independent, FEPS aims to establish an intellectual crossroads between social democracy and the European project, putting fresh thinking at the core

of its action. It acts as a platform to brew and test ideas, to confront policies and to carry out research, outside of day-to-day politics.

As the current financial crisis is affecting people on a global scale, it is necessary for European policies to include actors and institutions in third countries. To this end, FEPS has initiated contacts with think tanks in the USA, India, Africa and Latin America.

For more information please visit www.feps-europe.eu.

Belgian PS launches election campaign

Brussels Labour, along with the Party of European Socialists, the French Parti Socialiste and other sister parties had a stand at the launch of the Francophone Belgian PS European campaign on 29 March.



The day was a great success, and the Brussels Labour stand got visitors from Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, Martine Aubry (President of the French PS), Elio di Rupo (President of Belgian PS), Jean-Claude Marcourt (N°1 on the PS European list), Freddy Thielemans (Bourgemestre of Bruxelles-Capitale), and Philippe Busquin MEP.

Thank you for all those who helped out on the day.

LICC election results

The elections for the Labour International Co-ordinating Committee (LICC) took place on 15 April 2009.

Brussels Labour congratulates those who were elected, including our own Frazer Clarke and Maggie Coulthard. The other members of the committee will be Lorraine Hardy, Terry Kendellen, Jeremy Millard and Sylvia Moore.

The new LICC has provisionally agreed the officer positions until the committee can be formalised at the AGM, to be held at Annual Conference 2009. They are:

Jeremy Millard (Chair)

Maggie Coulthard (Vice-Chair)

Lorraine Hardy (Secretary)

Frazer Clarke (Treasurer, with responsibility for membership)

Due to the 2008 Rule Change, Labour International is entitled to send an extra woman delegate to Annual Conference this year, as it has more than 100 women members (previously the threshold was 400 members). Last year's delegate was a man, therefore this year the main delegate must be a woman, so LI must send two women delegates. If any member is interested in attending please contact Lorraine Hardy as Secretary on telephone Spain (00 34) 96561 5348 or by email as soon as possible as the deadline for delegates to express an interest is mid-June.

Campaign fund

Brussels Labour has established this Campaign Fund specifically to fund Conference fringe events, speaking engagements at local party meetings, campaigning materials etc.

This fund, separate from Brussels Labour subscriptions and Labour Party membership fees, provides a separate resource to support campaigning events focused on European issues. It has also allowed us to cap the current subscription level at €25 per annum.

If you would like to make a contribution, you can do so through a one-off donation or, preferably, through an annual, quarterly or monthly standing order.

For further details please contact the Treasurer, David O'Leary at :

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1030 Schaerbeek**

or by email at dave.oleary@gmail.com

BL online

The Brussels Labour website is available at www.brusselslabour.org.

Brussels Labour is now on Facebook as well – just go to <http://is.gd/huT0> and sign up if you are a Facebook member.

Executive committee

The Brussels Labour AGM took place on 18 March and elected the following members to form the Executive Committee for 2009-2010:

Chair: Belinda Pyke

Vice-chair: David Earnshaw

Secretary: Sarah Millar

Treasurer: David O'Leary

Committee members: Frazer Clarke, Emma Eatwell, Keir Fitch, Jacqui Hale, Isabel Summers, Jo Wood.

The branch thanked Stephen Kinsella and Tessa Ryan for their service on the committee.

Subscriptions 2009

Please do remember to pay your subscriptions for 2009 (25 EUR waged, 5 EUR stagiaire/unwaged). We will be in touch with those who haven't but it would be a great help if you could check that you have done so. Our bank account is Fortis 001-1128765-52.

If you have recently changed your postal contact details, please let us know: secretary@brusselslabour.org

Next meeting

The next Brussels Labour branch meeting takes place on Wednesday 13 May at Arthur's, Rue de Treves 26, 1050 Brussels, at 19:30.

Will you lift a finger to help a Palestinian?

The recent siege of Gaza was one of the most dispiriting events of recent times in the Middle East conflict. It seemed difficult to know what anyone could do to help. Resolving the political crisis is one thing; but Palestinians also need skilled people to help to develop the economic, technical and social infrastructures that are desperately needed.

Academics at Durham University, together with local Labour Party supporters and others created the Durham Palestine Education Trust to assist the social and economic development of Palestine by providing scholarships for out-

standing Palestinian graduates studying for Masters Degrees at Durham University.

DPET brings students from the West Bank and Gaza to various departments, including Applied Social Studies, Durham Business School, Engineering, Computer Science, Economics, Physics, Chemistry, English, Mathematics, Modern Languages and Archaeology.

The skills gained by these students have an importance far beyond the students' personal and professional development. They will help transform the lives of countless Palestinians when they return home.

You can help raise money by simply lifting your finger! Use **everyclick.com** as a search engine, buy your books from **Amazon** via DPET, and buy and sell on **eBay** through MissionFish. All your clicks cause a donation to be made to DPET. To find out how, go to www.dpet.org.uk and click on the appropriate logo. DPET relies entirely on individual donations and fundraising events. It has no paid workers so every penny raised goes directly to Palestinian scholarships.

Peter Wragg