

Germinal

The Brussels Labour International Branch newsletter

Labour and European values: a synergy at the heart of Europe

Rachel Buchanen

Brussels Labour was delighted to welcome Geoff Hoon MP to deliver the annual John Fitzmaurice memorial lecture on 22 January.

After paying tribute to John Fitzmaurice and to the late Phillip Whitehead MEP, Geoff observed that 2007 provided a timely opportunity to take stock, not only of the government's record in office but also of the evolution of the Labour Party's views on the European Union, as this year marks both the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome and the tenth anniversary of the Labour Party winning back power.

He observed that although a pragmatic and positive approach eluded Labour during its years in opposition, modernisation has brought it a more realistic, pro-European approach. Labour holds specific values which link the party's objectives to those of the EU, such as social justice, internationalism and solidarity. These values underpin the modern, positive and progressive approach to the EU that has been developed in the later stages of opposition and whilst in Government.

In contrast, the Conservative Party is marked by disarray in its approach to Europe and has taken a step away from traditional mainstream Conservative values, with David Cameron advocating plans to leave the European People's Party - European Democrats Group in the European Parliament (EPP-ED).

He stated that the political landscape in Europe is continuously changing,



Geoff Hoon delivers the annual John Fitzmaurice memorial lecture at the Centre

with left-of-centre parties being in the ascendancy, recently regaining power in Italy and Austria. They are in government or leading coalition governments in Spain, Portugal, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and, of course, the United Kingdom. They form part of coalitions in The Netherlands, Finland, Germany, Belgium, Lithuania and Luxembourg. The Party of European Socialists and the Socialist Group in the European Parliament are also going from strength to strength.

In particular, 2007 is a year to remember the achievements that we have made since 1957. Geoff highlighted the particular achievements that have been made

over these last five decades, such as peace and prosperity, the single market and the extensive rights we now hold as employees, consumers and individuals. In particular, he looked forward to the plans of the EU under the German and Portuguese Presidencies for negotiations to create a genuinely open European energy market, to liberalise postal services, to fundamentally review the Single Market, and to improve the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. He also observed the need to improve the decision-making processes in the European Union.

For the full text of Geoff's speech, please go to www.brusselslabour.org/johnfitzmauricelecture.htm.

The race for the deputy leadership

Sarah Millar

Secretary, Brussels Labour

In April, Brussels Labour welcomed Hazel Blears MP for a second time. Hazel came to talk about the work she has been undertaking as Party Chair and to present her candidacy for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party.

Party Chair

As Party Chair, Hazel explained that the Prime Minister had given her a number of specific roles: firstly, to work on the Scottish, Welsh and local elections; secondly, to rebuild the Party; and finally, to rebuild the public's trust in politics - no small task!

Clearly, said Hazel, the Party is not enjoying the same levels of support as it had in 1997 and 2001, but the 2005 election had demonstrated a return to normality. This return to 'politics as usual' requires members to re-learn the art of campaigning and to fight to win, street by street. This approach, based on concrete issues (health, education, jobs, climate change, counter-terrorism) will help to deliver all three of the goals set out by the Prime Minister.

Deputy leadership

Hazel then outlined her vision for the deputy leadership of the Party. The deputy leader should be the voice of the Party at the Cabinet table, keep-



Hazel Blears addresses the Branch meeting, flanked by Belinda Pyke and Gary Titley MEP

ing the Government political and ensuring the Party can be motivated by the Government's priorities.

The relationship must work both ways: the deputy leader must also be able to deliver sometimes tough messages to the Party. Members need to have much more ownership of policy. This includes integrating Europe into policy deliberations, not treating it as a separate, marginalised issue.

Without fresh ideas and trust, the Party - with or without a new leader and deputy leader team - would not be attractive to British voters at the next

general election.

Hazel also sees the role of deputy leader as a "minister for delivery" - in effect, a cross-cutting role to ensure joined up policies and joined up delivery. The new deputy leader, Hazel argued, must also get a strong handle on campaign expenditure and ensure a stable financial footing for the Party.

Brussels Labour was also kindly invited by the EPLP to attend meetings with Deputy Leadership candidates Hilary Benn and John Cruddas.

CANDIDATES

Deputy leadership of the Labour Party



Hilary Benn

Hazel Blears

Jon Cruddas

Peter Hain

Harriet Harman

Alan Johnson

Europe's social reality

Keir Fitch

Roger Liddle addressed a well-attended meeting on the question of 'social reality', following the Commission's recent 'social reality stocktaking' paper. Roger has previously been an advisor to Tony Blair and a member of Peter Mandelson's cabinet, before joining the Commission President's Bureau of European policy advisors (BEPA), on behalf of which he wrote the paper.

Roger told us that the EU currently faces a crisis, though the Union's rationale is stronger than ever, enabling the Member States to manage and shape globalisation – working on climate change, trade and global poverty, for example.

Roger looked at the causes of this crisis of confidence. Here, the findings of the social reality survey were striking: while before the end of the Cold War, the *raison d'être* of the EU was to promote peace and prosperity, most citizens now believe that life will be worse for their children than it has been for them. This social pessimism is balanced by

personal optimism about individuals' own circumstances. These trends have fuelled the growth of anti-EU populism on both Left and Right.

The knowledge economy too is creating difficulties – too many are unable to take part in it and feel they become losers from globalisation in the process. But anti-EU feeling is also directly linked to the EU's own policies, particularly liberalisation and enlargement—now linked to concerns about immigration and worries about the future.

Roger moved on to consider how Europe could address the concerns of those feeling that they were missing out due to globalisation. There is a fundamental flaw in our system of governance. The EU's major powers concern trade, competition and the creation of the single market – all things which now seem very threatening. But so far there has been no effective response in Member States to the changed circumstances. We therefore need a policy of active social protection, and to create this, a common frame of reference and partnership between the EU and individual Member States on what each should be trying to do. The

Lisbon strategy was all about this but is not working well, so we need a new reference for the future. This is to be provided by the social reality paper.

In the paper, Roger explained that they note that EU welfare states were built on a different social model – that of mass manufacture and a male breadwinner. We must now adapt to a post-industrial knowledge and service economy, where industry and agriculture are in rapid decline. Whilst 40% of jobs now need high-level technical or intellectual skills, about 30% of the EU workforce is totally unskilled – and the traditional "good" jobs for this ground are disappearing. The unskilled are three times more likely to be unemployed than others – but even now one-sixth of all school leavers have no qualifications.

Furthermore, there has been huge social change, with the fall in birth rate and role of the extended family, coupled with improvements in gender equality and life expectancy. Adapting to these changes presents a massive challenge, while we have yet to overcome major issues of youth unemployment and unemployment of older workers.

Roger looked at how to deal with these issues. On education, there is a great difference in performance between Member States – in Finland, 98% of girls and 92% of boys achieve the Pisa minimum standard, whilst the EU average is only 80%. We need to understand why. On the birth rate, many surveys showed that women were not having all the children they ideally wanted, for reasons of economics, lack of child care and work-life balance. Support for dual earning couples was key to stabilising the birth rate. At present provision of child care is very patchy across the Union – but it is clear that the birth rate is highest in those Member States with the best provision.

More immigration will be

> 7



Roger Liddle with
Belinda Pyke

Informal EU Summit Hampton Court



The end of an era

David O'Leary

On 27 June, Tony Blair will leave Downing Street for Buckingham Palace on his last journey as Prime Minister. Just over ten years ago, he made the same journey to become the first Labour prime minister since 1979, swept to power on a tide of public optimism. Expectations were high – too high – and have not been completely fulfilled. Yet Blair resigns as the most successful Labour leader ever, in electoral terms at least.

When John Smith died on 8 May 1994, Blair, Labour's shadow home secretary, came to the fore as the 'modernising' candidate. Gordon Brown, the shadow chancellor and Blair's long-time political friend, stepped aside for his colleague. Blair won convincingly and he and Brown

became a formidable partnership in opposition, and later in government. Yet the nature of the agreement also led to tensions between the two that have never been fully healed.

Blair's first act as Labour leader was to reform the party's constitution. Clause IV, committing Labour to full common ownership, was little known by the wider public, and barely reflected the modern reality of the party's manifesto. Blair saw it as an opportunity to re-position Labour and to show the general public that the party had changed and was ready to govern. 'New Labour' was born.

This was not the beginning of 'spin', but New Labour – guided by the hands of Peter Mandelson and Alastair Campbell – became more media-savvy and the message more polished. The party – particularly in

comparison to the hobbling Tory government – looked bright, attractive, and in-touch. And on 1 May 1997, Labour won the general election with an extraordinary majority of 179 seats.

A flurry of activity followed, bringing some of the measures of which Labour members have been most proud: a national minimum wage; a windfall tax on the excessive profits generated by privatisation of public utilities; tax credits for the poorest; the signature of the Social Chapter at the Amsterdam summit; reform of primary education; devolution in Scotland and Wales; reform of the House of Lords; and the Human Rights Act. The list goes on. The new chancellor, Gordon Brown, announced that the Bank of England would set interest rates independently - a bold move, born out of the

catastrophe of Black Wednesday, that has helped to maintain constant growth in the UK economy for a full decade. Equality legislation was implemented, and Britain was becoming (in legal terms, at least) a more tolerant place. Things *were* getting better. For a while, it even looked as though the UK might join the euro.

Britain was a more confident player globally – Blair enjoyed a good relationship with Bill Clinton and with European leaders such as Jacques Chirac, with whom he signed a defence agreement. Britain was at the forefront of coalitions to remove an oppressive regime in Sierra Leone and halt genocide in Kosovo – two interventions that were signs of things to come.

There were problems – a donation by Bernie Ecclestone tarnished the ‘whiter than white’ image to which Blair aspired. Measures on student loans and tuition fees provoked anger. Yet Labour won again in 2001, with an almost identical majority as four years earlier, following an insipid campaign that was livened only by John Prescott’s fist and William Hague’s ‘14 pints’ claim.

Blair had reached an instant rapport with the new American president, George W. Bush, but it was the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 that brought them closer together and which would set the backdrop for the remaining years of both leaders’ time in office. Afghanistan was the scene for retaliation, and the Taliban was removed from power, although its malevolent influence lingers to this day.



Rumours abounded that Iraq was next, with the leaders claiming Saddam Hussein harboured weapons of mass destruction. This war would be a much tougher conflict to sell to the public, and especially the Labour Party, elements of which had long seen Blair as a ‘Tory in disguise’ and was (justifiably) deeply suspicious of any alliance with a right-wing, conservative US president.

Blair had to convince his own MPs, which he managed in one of his finest speeches in the House of Commons. Yet the ‘evidence’ on which his convincing rhetoric was based had been exaggerated. Britain was led into an illegal war that cost Blair many western European friends (but which gained him support from many in the governments of those countries waiting to join the EU). ‘Victory’ was swift, yet the violence continued. The David Kelly affair and the Hutton Inquiry blew open the internal machinations of the men at the top, and hit the public’s level of trust in the government. Labour was punished in the 2005 general election, principally due to the war, with the party’s majority cut to 66 seats.

Blair had already signalled his intention not to serve a full third term as prime minister, shortly after being admitted to hospital with a heart problem in 2004. Shortly after the election, the 7 July bombings hit London. The government introduced tough measures to try to prevent a repeat, yet civil liberties were being trampled. Plans to increase detention periods for suspected terrorists were defeated by Labour MPs.

By 2006, David Cameron had become the Tory leader and signalled an improvement in the Tories’ fortunes. Labour MPs – including the chancellor – became twitchy. Blair faced an attempted coup that was averted only by his announcement that he would leave Number 10 by mid-2007. His final year in power brought some success – notably a devolved government in Northern Ireland – but it felt as though many items were left as ‘pending’ for the new PM.

The sense of wasted time is perhaps one that permeates the Blair years – in spite of the government’s successes. Health services and education have improved, but not as much as had been hoped. Structural reforms in the first term, such as scaling back the internal market in the NHS, were reversed in the second term. Whatever the rights and wrongs, time, effort, and political goodwill was wasted. University top-up fees and foundation hospitals tested Labour MPs’ and party members’ patience. Yet for Blair, as with Iraq, these changes were “the right thing to do”. Constitutional reform continues, yet in the public perception, the House of Lords now has cronies instead of earls and barons.

In Europe, Blair gave the impression of becoming increasingly disillusioned. The single currency was a non-starter politically and, so argued the chancellor, economically. Public opinion turned against the EU, and Blair put up little resistance. He conceded a public referendum on the constitutional treaty, with the inevitable rejection of the text prevented only by the French and Dutch ‘noes’.

Blair made another fine speech at the European Parliament to launch the UK presidency in 2005, but little action followed. The goodwill generated in 1997 could have been used to help bring the UK closer to the EU, yet ten years on, Britons are as Eurosceptic – if not more so – than ever.

Blair has changed politics – the evidence is clear in Cameron’s imitation and Brown’s attempts to public demonstrate the warmer side of his personality. In policy terms, the parameters have changed: the Conservatives now would not contemplate proposing a manifesto that would cut spending in public services, revoke the independence of the Bank of England, or bin the minimum wage. Yet, for all Blair’s achievements – which will be more kindly looked upon in time – his ‘legacy’ will always be haunted by an ill-conceived war, and the chaos that followed.

Socialist reflections and perspectives, 2004-2009

Sarah Millar

Secretary, Brussels Labour

On his last day as General Secretary of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, David Harley came to share his reflections on the past and his perspectives for the future with Brussels Labour.

PSE voting record: united and impressive

The second largest political group in the European Parliament, David thought that the PSE had been the smartest in the first half of the Parliament.

On the Barroso Commission mark I and Turkey in 2004, on the Constitutional Treaty, and more recently on REACH and the Services Directive, the PSE has held firm and



The Socialist Group showed leadership on REACH and the Services Directive, according to Harley



voted together, even when opinion has been divided. By taking tough policy decisions and defining the PSE position internally, David described how it was then possible to build up support and negotiate with other political groups.

In reality, because of the make up of the Parliament, there has been fruitful co-operation between all of the political groups, nowhere more so than on REACH and the Services Directive.

Relations with the Party of European Socialists and relations with the UK

David reflected that following the legal challenges of 2004, the PES is a more effective force with a more dynamic President. With separate finances and structural arrangements, as well as moving into independent offices, the PES has shown it is an "action" organisation capable of producing policy papers, mobilising supporters and inspired by opposition politics in a significant number of the EU Member States.

It is hard to have any discussion about the UK's relations with the EU and consequently about the UK's relations with the PSE without Iraq being mentioned. It is hard to deny that the 'Iraq Factor' has had and continues to have an impact. However, David felt that the UK Presidency in 2005 and in particular Tony Blair's speeches to the European Parliament had helped to rebuild, if not broken, perhaps still rickety bridges.

Looking Ahead

On the whole the PSE report card for the first half of the Parliamentary term has been good, but of course the 2009 European Elections will soon be upon us and this will have important ramifications for relationships inside



the Parliament.

It is right to take pleasure from the successes achieved by the PSE but there will be important challenges ahead including a revived Constitutional Treaty, accession negotiations with Turkey, new groupings in the European Parliament structure and action on energy and climate change that will test the united voting record.

There will also be important changes in national politics leading up to the European elections but David is confident that social democracy has a strong future in Member States and in the European Parliament and we should all hope for the best!

Germinal

If you have any comments or questions about Germinal, or if you would like to contribute an article, please contact the Editor at eatwell@gmail.com.

Articles reflect the author's views, and not necessarily those of Brussels Labour or its Executive Committee.

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Design: **David O'Leary**

Social Reality

3 > needed to cope with demographic change – but again the record on integrating immigrants is poor across the EU. For example, in the Netherlands, 66% of “native” Dutch have jobs, compared to only 40% of those of Moroccan origin. The situation is similar in Belgium, while German Turks have little chance of reaching university. In this area the EU is much worse performing than Australia and Canada, for example.

Although the UK currently looks on continental Europe as a failing model, we share most of the trends. Whilst the employment rate is above average, on indicators of mobility, health and family, the UK is similar to or worse than the EU average.

Roger then looked at where the EU had a role in dealing with these issues. It should certainly not be by

taking over social security or pension provision; rather, it must promote much more exchange of best practice and experience between Member States. This should be via a revamped, more open and political “open method of coordination”, looking in much more depth at the reasons behind Member States’ differing performances.

There should be radical reform of EU budgetary priorities, with support going to child care, learning credits and bursaries to help the disadvantaged into higher education. Binding social targets for Member States should be established, based on their current social and income levels (as with Kyoto targets).

On the economic front, more work was needed to revitalise the idea of stakeholder capitalism, and reverse the share of wages versus profits in the

economy. Since most big companies are at least European in scale, economic policy must be too.

Finally, looking at the UK’s need for better engagement with the EU, Roger considered why the government had not done more on the social agenda, given the initial enthusiasm for the Delors plan when in opposition. Clearly there had been a need to be seen to have a business friendly agenda, and a real concern to keep flexible labour markets to help deliver low inflation. Both concerns had been exaggerated. We should have a bold agenda, arguing that addressing these social issues was pro-economic. It would be a good election issue, since David Cameron still opposes the Social Chapter.

Following Roger’s talk, there was a wide-ranging discussion on the issues he had raised.

AGM 2007

Emma Eatwell
Editor, Germinal

Brussels Labour held its Annual General Meeting on 21 March, during which Belinda Pyke, as Chair, gave her annual report on the branch’s activities and thanked all those who had made a contribution over the past twelve months.

The members of the Executive Committee were up for election, with the following people returned unopposed:

- **Chair:** Belinda Pyke
- **Vice-chair:** David Earnshaw
- **Secretary:** Sarah Millar
- **Treasurer:** David O’Leary
- **Members of the committee:** Frazer Clarke, Emma Eatwell, Keir Fitch, Jacqui Hale, Stephen Kinsella and Tessa Ryan.

Rachel Buchanan decided to stand down from the Executive Committee this year. Belinda thanked Rachel for her work as a committee member over the past few years, and in particular for contributing her skills as Editor of Germinal.

Jeremy Jennings stood down as an auditor. Mike Ridgeway was re-elected and Peter Wragg was elected to join him.

There was a discussion about the accounts, which were signed off by the auditors. Belinda thanked Jeremy and Mike for their hard work and welcomed Peter.

The branch also discussed a full budget for the Branch, presented by the Treasurer. This item was introduced onto the agenda of the AGM for the first time in order to provide Branch members with a clear

indication of how money is spent throughout the year. The budget was approved.

Stephen Kinsella presented a fundraising initiative of the Executive Committee in order to allow the Branch to host well-received, but sometimes costly meetings at the Party’s annual conference. Letters about the initiative have since been distributed to Branch members.

The AGM also allowed discussion of other issues affecting the workings of the Branch.

Following the statutory part of the meeting, the Branch welcomed Julian Scola from the Party of European Socialists, who presented the PES Activists programme, which had been recently launched by the Party, and gave details on how Brussels Labour members can participate.

LI update

Gus Glover

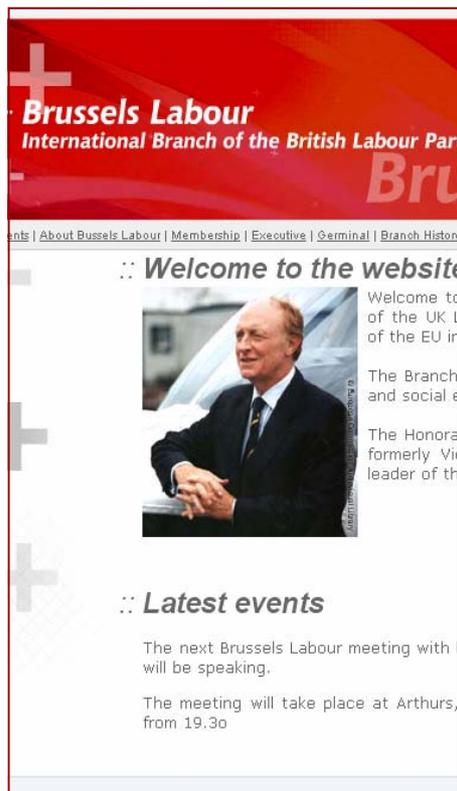
LI membership secretary

It has been an interesting few months for Labour International, the most notable event being the launch of the Red Rose Forum. This is a forum where Labour Party members from branches across the world can share their views and experiences, which is particularly useful for an overseas organisation like Brussels Labour.

Branch development is one of the main activities of the Labour International Coordination Committee and so we are pleased to have seen the recent re-launch of the French Branch of Labour International. This year the French Branch participated heavily in the Presidential campaign of Segolène Royal and in recognition of the work being done by French members, LICC has decided to send one of their members as a delegate to the next Labour Party conference. LICC will also propose to co-opt a French member to the Executive Committee.

Members of the LICC recently met Hazel Blears, to discuss overseas voting rights. The meeting was a success and those present reported that there appeared to be some movement on the issue. Members from Spain have also been involved in a campaign by the Foreign Office to register overseas voters. LICC will follow up on both of these activities and we firmly believe that we have made real advancements in the quest to preserve our right to vote.

Relations with the PES have also been strengthened, especially since the Congress in Porto. The LICC Chair now has regular contact with the PES and helps to organise and recruit PES activists. LICC hopes that through this action, other members, such as those in Eastern Europe, will be able to get involved in campaigning and possibly establish additional Labour International branches.



Brussels Labour
International Branch of the British Labour Party

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:: Welcome to the website

Welcome to the website of the UK Labour Party's International Branch of the EU in Brussels.

The Branch focuses on social and political issues.

The Honorary Vice-Chairman and former Vice-Chairman of the Party.

Latest events

The next Brussels Labour meeting with Hazel Blears will be speaking.

The meeting will take place at Arthur's, from 19.30

New website

Keir Fitch

Webmaster, Brussels Labour website

After four years, Brussels Labour decided it was time to update our website, to give it a fresh look and to take advantage of the new easy to use (and cheaper!) tools now available.

On the new site it will be much easier to upload documents and photos and to create new pages and sections for topics of current interest.

The new site is at the same address - www.brusselslabour.org - so have a look. I would be very grateful for your feedback, so that we can make sure it includes the information that would be most useful.

One criticism of the old site was that the colours were not suitable for people with visual disabilities - it is now easy to change the colour scheme, so let me know if different colours, type faces, etc would be appropriate.



Tuesday 12 June at 2000

Alan Johnson MP
Secretary of State for Education
and Labour Party deputy
leadership candidate

Arthur's, Rue du Trèves 26



Wednesday 27 June at 1930

Harlem Désir MEP
on the French elections

Arthur's, Rue du Trèves 26

Wednesday 4 July 2007

Summer Social

Rue Alphonse Hottat 33, 1050 Ixelles

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