



Germinal

The Brussels Labour International Branch newsletter

June 2008

Migration and immigration: building European communities

Brussels Labour's 2008 AGM took place on 26 March.

Following a lively business session (see box, right), there was a panel debate and Q&A with guest speakers Claude Moraes MEP and Pascale Charhon, Director of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) addressing a question that goes to the heart of European politics: 'Migration and Immigration: European Communities?'

Claude Moraes kicked off describing migration as a 'visceral' issue. He spoke from personal experience as well as detailing the hostile reaction

of some voters in his constituency (including a new youth demographic) to the recent enlargement and the new wave of immigrants to their areas. Claude argued that positive economic and cultural contribution made by migrants speak volumes where there is willingness to make the case for it. However, there needs to be more boldness and better communication in confronting the right-wing anti-immigration lobby within our own ranks.

Pascale Charhon spoke from a pan-European perspective, citing the findings of the most

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AGM 2008

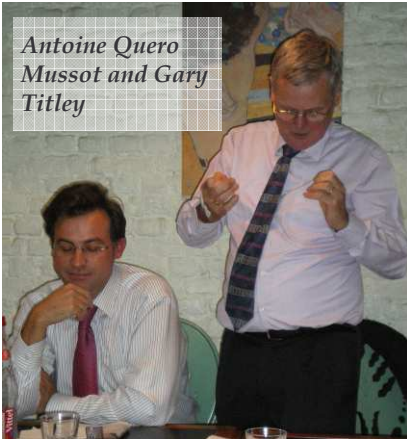
At a lively AGM, Brussels Labour Chair Belinda Pyke and Secretary Sarah Millar summed up the year, noting the continued essential role the Branch has in pushing for European values to be at the heart of the Labour Party; as well as in pursuing campaigns of interest to members, such as voting rights for expatriates.

A number of highlights from 2007 drew a special mention: notably the successful conference fringe meeting on employment, migration and rights held jointly with the European Parliamentary Labour Party with Liam Byrne MP, Claude Moraes MEP, Neil Kinnock and Emine Bozkurt MEP, the John Fitzmaurice Memorial Lecture with Julian Priestley, as well as the fact that Brussels Labour meetings were addressed by nearly all the Deputy Leadership candidates. Brussels Labour treasurer, David O'Leary, reported that the accounts were in surplus in 2007-8.

The Chair announced that there will be no rate increase in subscriptions for the coming year. Since the Executive Committee was presenting itself for reelection to the same positions the formal AGM concluded with Committee duly re-elected unopposed.



Spain's victorious Socialists: lessons for Labour



Antoine Quero
Mussot and Gary
Titley

Gary Titley MEP and Antoine Quero Mussot (PSOE) spoke to the branch about the recent elections in Spain and the UK and how we can learn from each other as the political cycles play out.

Giving his reasons for the PSOE success in the recent general election, Gary gave an interesting explanation of the process that PSOE had been through in putting together its manifesto. On the face of it, the PSOE should not have won, given the downturn in the Spanish economy. This was very different to the way the Labour Party operates. The PSOE carried out much consultation with members and non-members alike and cleverly leaked snippets to the press, gradually creating interest and media exposure for their policies.

The Catholic church was very vocal in its support of the opposition but the PSOE demonstrated that they are a progressive social party and convinced them that the economy was a global problem and that the government was doing its best to help Spanish citizens. In the end, the PSOE represented what the Spanish people thought of themselves. Gary thinks that Labour can learn a lot, particularly on demonstrating trust and competence.

Antoine Quero Mussot was interested to see that Gary had weighted the points of the campaign and election in a different way to the way politicians in Spain see the situation internally.

He firmly believes that politics is about cycles and cited the fact that in 1997 the PSOE was at the bottom of their cycle, which prompted a renewal of the Party. He gave some background into the highs and lows of the PSOE in recent years, referring to the PSOE win in 2004. He stated that the policies of the government in its first term were vital and there was a necessary cohesion within the Party. During the second term, was about delivery and concrete results, turning the laws of the first term into reality. The Socialist government did this successfully and now their attention has turned to managing integration of immigrants alongside the downturn in the economy. The government recognises that

this second term will not be easy but delivery is the key.

Questions included the impact on Spanish national politics of the discussions on Europe - not really an issue, given the widespread agreement on the EU, the impact of the church - reducing, the impact of the water shortage - regions do not want to help each other out.

Antoine was also asked how a Party could reinvent itself whilst in government, to which he responded that this was a new issue for the PSOE. The government is aiming for continuity and reinvention together. They have appointed no heavyweights from the first term but have instead asked these people to head up think tanks, to prepare the 2012-2016 PSOE strategy. The entire cabinet is under 40, which may even lead to a reinvention in itself.

One point that elicited a collective draw of breath from those present was the stark difference in the way the PSOE views its expats. There is a specific programme for Spanish citizens abroad and the government is looking into the possibility of creating an 'overseas constituency' which would have its own MP - perhaps we can learn more from the Spanish than they can from us!

Emma Eatwell

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recent ENAR Shadow Report on Racism in Europe to argue that nuances are often lost in migration debate between different waves of migrants, different communities and motivations.

The terms of this debate need to be clarified and we need to move away from taking the security-based approach to the issue to a more humane approach emphasising the circular nature of migration. In this connection both panellists drew upon examples

from the recent enlargement of the EU, as citizens from many new EU Member States use their skills and experiences to contribute to host economies before returning to boost development back home.

Jacqui Hale

Prime ministers are temporary workers, too...

“We’re doomed, we’re doomed!” intoned Private Fraser in *Dad’s Army* whenever that loveable rabble of Home Guardsmen were landed in trouble and this was pretty much the mood of Brussels Labour’s meeting with Chris McLaughlin, Editor of *Tribune*, on 9 April.

“Towards permanent rights for temporary workers?” was the theme, but the leitmotif was the state of the Labour Government...and this was before the local elections on 1 May!



“What’s going on?” said McLaughlin. “Gordon Brown pitched himself as a leader for both change and continuity, but we’ve had too much of the latter and not enough of the former.” There’s a feeling that too much has been done for the wealthy, and while good things have been achieved, the Government has lost touch with our core purpose.”

“There is a doorstep reluctance to continue backing Labour, especially with the abolition of the 10p tax rate that hits the poorest. And if the Tories were to defeat Ken Livingstone in the London Mayoral election, then David Cameron might begin to consolidate what has so far been a protest vote.” (gulp)

As a public speaker, Chris McLaughlin is so softly spoken that he could announce the slaughter of the firstborn without raising an eyebrow. Concentration was needed for this event.

“There were winners and losers,” he said. Social justice, collectivism and solidarity were giving way to consumerism, individualism and lifestyle. And now we were also beginning to see job losses.

Into this mix come “EU restrictions on workers’ rights, the empowerment of multinational companies and the diluting of “Social Europe.” McLaughlin reminded us that it is 18 years since Jacques Delors turned the heads of Trade Union leaders towards Europe, a defining moment for the UK labour movement.

“Now there is suspicion,” he reported. “An anti-EU feeling is bubbling up. The question is not more Europe or less Europe, but what Europe do we want to be part of?”

Chris McLaughlin did get to the theme of temporary workers and described the present state of affairs as a “messy compromise.” Now that the Bill is dead, Trade Union leaders are suspicious of the proposed “commission”. And the CBI has a “bogus concern about job loss.”

After a number of controversial rulings in the Court of Justice it is hard not to feel some sympathy with the idea that worker’s rights have been weakened. However, it is worth pointing out that the proposed EU Directive was designed to protect temporary agency workers. It has been blocked by a number of Member States, the UK included.

Temporary agency workers are used to cut costs and increase flexibility by allowing companies to adjust staffing needs at short notice. This can also benefit individuals who choose to work flexibly. But temporary agency work has the worst record for working conditions: repetitive labour, workplace accidents, less training, work intensity, insecurity, and of course lower wages for similar work to that performed by permanent staff.

For many trade unionists, the way we treat temporary agency workers is a core issue. Unfair treatment and discrimination in the workplace are things that should not exist in Social Europe. For Chris McLaughlin, Gordon Brown’s Government is fudging the issue; and this is adding to the malaise.



There is still time for the Government to get back on track and regain the confidence of the electorate. This includes core Labour voters who have been voting with their feet. But if workers start turning their backs on Europe because they sense that Social Europe is at best a toothless tiger or at worst a sham, then Private Fraser may have a point.

Peter Wragg

Spring conference report



Brussels Labour at Spring Conference

*"The Spring is sprung, the grass is ris
I wonder where the delegates is"*

Labour's Spring Conference in Birmingham may not have had the buzz that Annual Conference generates but it was a stimulating event in what has been a difficult political climate for the party.

You will have seen reports of the "big" speeches, in particular the Brown and Harman set pieces, and Ken Livingstone's rallying call. I want to give a flavour of the smaller, and especially the European, activities that attracted delegates.

European Question Time was chaired by Polly Toynbee and featured MEPs Gary Titley and Arlene McCarthy, and Europe Minister Jim Murphy. The issues raised covered everything from how Europe should respond to gun crime, to the prospects for the Lisbon Treaty referendum in Ireland.

National Union of Students President Wes Streeting argued strongly for Labour to make the positive, social case for Europe. Patricia Hewitt MP said that Labour should emphasise its support for the EU as much as for reform of the EU. We need to emphasise dividing lines with the Tories, whose policies would have the UK at the margins of Europe.

Gary Titley said that we need to demonstrate that the EU is central to the process of building communities in a global Europe. Charles Clarke MP (from the floor) and Keith Vaz MP argued for that there would be merit at some stage in having a referendum on UK membership of the EU, although not on the Lisbon Treaty.

At the *Europe and Diversity reception*,

Gordon Brown, in excellent spirits and very witty, stressed how Europe is taking the lead on key issues, in particular climate change and the global fight against poverty. He also paid tribute to the work of Gary Titley as EPLP leader.

At the *European Election Manifesto meeting* David Miliband said that on jobs, climate change and development, the manifesto must stress that "the global is local". The PES manifesto has to distinguish itself from that of modern centre right parties. The key issues will be the economy and the environment.

Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, Leader of the PES, said that the manifesto would be short, sharp and focussed. The process is "bottom-up" and seeks to involve individual members and parties as far as possible (see www.manifesto2009.pes.org for details of how you can get involved). Citizens need to have a clear choice in the Euro-elections and to be made aware of the importance of the Parliament.

Ania Skrzypek, General secretary of ECOSY (European Socialist Youth), highlighted the contrast between the lack of interest in the European elections and the massive media coverage of the US primaries. The manifesto process allows the Party to take on board the views not only of its parties and members but also of left organisations that may or may not support Socialist governments. We have to have a distinct vision and agenda.

Richard Howitt MEP said that MEPs feel committed to the manifesto and want PES candidates across Europe to speak with a single voice. We need clear dividing lines between political ideologies, not countries. The PES manifesto has to be considered as seriously as national manifestos.

At the *EPLP Candidates breakfast*, the discussion centred on communication and delivering the Labour vote.



Gordon Brown at the Europe and Diversity reception

Claude Moraes MEP emphasised the need to build on existing structures such as trade union and NGO links.

The EPLP wants not only to maximise the number of Labour MEPs but also to avoid any BNP MEPs being elected, reduce the numbers of UKIP MEPs, and to build a positive European narrative. The key issue is turnout among Labour supporters.

Other sessions combined local and European themes, such as how best to engage citizens from other EU countries in the May elections.

The Spring Conference combined the traditional Labour Local Government, European, and Women's Conferences, and it was good to see European issues having a high profile and a positive to the EU throughout the weekend.

The immediate priority for the Party was clearly to achieve good results in the local, and most of all the London Mayoral, elections. But Labour is already starting to take on board how important the European elections will be in 2009.

We need to build on the positive engagement in Birmingham - demonstrated also in the commitment of Jim Murphy and others in the Lisbon Treaty debate in the Commons - and to carry that through to June (or will it be May?) next year when the moment of truth comes for our MEPs.

Frazer Clarke

BRANCH MEETING

Arlene McCarthy *Chair, EP IMCO committee*

When EU rules become a matter of life and death

Arlene spoke to a joint meeting of Brussels Labour and Brussels Coop Party on her work in the European Parliament's Consumer Protection Committee, of which she is now the chair. She described chairing as being a management rather than purely political task.

Speaking first on the general situation of Europe in UK politics, she lamented the lack of EU enthusiasm across the UK, and thus the importance of Brussels Labour in continuing to project a positive European message. Europe is a history of lost opportunities for the UK, as she noted in a 1996 book with Philip Whitehead. However, we should not be too negative – people were much more interested in the EU when they could see the positive influence it had on their lives. Here, Labour has a good story to tell, for example with

a major and positive input to the anti-discrimination package. We need to use these examples to combat the deeply negative and frustrating influence of the press and to show that the Tories are essentially unchanged and would take any chance to opt out of the Social Chapter and all the protection that has given people.

Arlene then gave a practical example of the important work of the Consumer Protection committee – the Gun Control Directive. This was originally proposed by the Commission as a limited, technical updating Directive. However, shortly before it came to the Parliament, Arlene had spent time shadowing the Manchester police, seeing a wide range of operations, including both an anti-terrorist raid and time with the anti-gun crime unit. The police had used this to impress on her the damage caused by the free

availability of replica weapons in many Member States, with 46% of all guns recovered by the police in Manchester being converted.

The draft Directive did not cover convertible weapons at all and Arlene wanted to ensure they were covered by the control system applied to other weapons. With much lobbying and collaboration with the Police Federation and colleagues in the Green group (Arlene's proposals were opposed by the EPP, Forza Italia and the Parliamentary Inter-group for Hunting and Fishing), the amendments were supported by the European Parliament. Finally adopted, the new rules will be in force by 2014, when full traceability of all firearms, including replicas, will be ensured.

Keir Fitch

Meeting with US Democrats in Brussels



(left to right) Kevin Prager, Peter Skinner MEP and Gerry Loftus

In February, Brussels Labour held a joint meeting with Democrats Abroad in Brussels (DAB). Kevin Prager talked about being a US citizen in Brussels; about growing DAB to a sizeable membership, and then went into the structure of nominating and mechanisms for vot-

ing involving overseas members of the Democratic party. Gerry Loftus offered an analysis of the forthcoming elections, revealing that many of the overseas members are backing Obama and speculated on the potential of each candidate to beat McCain.

Subscriptions

Please don't forget to renew your subscription to Brussels Labour for 2008.

The 25 EUR fee (5 EUR for stagiaires and unwaged) can be paid in cash at a branch meeting or by bank transfer / direct debit into Fortis account 001-1128765-52. Further details are available from the branch treasurer, David O'Leary, at dave.oleary@gmail.com.

David is also happy to provide information on our campaign fund. By receiving further donations to Branch funds, we can continue to host successful events at Labour conferences.

Getting involved in Labour International

Labour International is the branch for members not resident in the UK. Thanks to a long campaign by Brussels Labour, the Party has formally recognised overseas members for more than ten years.

Current LI membership is about 600 of which about one-sixth live in Belgium. Brussels Labour is a recognised group of LI, our rules having been approved by the NEC.

Our role is analogous to that of a branch within a CLP and so part of each member's individual subscription is transferred by the Party to LI to support organising costs. None of this comes to Brussels Labour, which is why we charge a small fee to members of Brussels Labour. LI's executive body is the Labour International Coordinating Committee (LICC).

LI members will have received a mailing in April, with information about past and planned activities, as well as a call for nominations to the LICC and for nominations for LI's conference delegate.

Frazer Clarke from Brussels was the only candidate for the position of conference delegate. The nominations for the places on LICC closed at the end of the month, however, the approval of the nominations process is still pending.

LICC's main task is to promote Party membership and the creation of LI groups/branches, as well as to campaign on matters of special interest to UK citizens living abroad, notably our voting rights. As can be seen from the mailing, LI activity in France has been revived: the Paris branch no longer seems to function but a meeting is being held there on 10 May to revive

interest. Brussels, Geneva and Spain remain the only active branches which hold regular meetings.

Evidently, the geographical dispersion of the membership makes it hard to organise Party activity outside major cities so LICC is trying to promote more active electronic communication.

It is also promoting membership of PES Activists. Finally it plans to hold a number of meetings at Party conference, including one with the International Consortium of British Pensioners. Information will be circulated once available.

Belinda Pyke

LI website www.labourint.org.uk

PES activists www.pes.org/content/home_activists/2007/170/

In brief

NEXT MEETINGS

Tuesday 24 June at 8pm

Anna Colombo (Secretary-General, Socialist Group)

The Italian elections, the European elections, and Europe after the Irish 'No' (Joint meeting with Italian sister party) @ PES, Rue du Trône 98, Brussels

Wednesday 16 July

Summer Social

@ Rue Alphonse Hottat 33, Ixelles

More details will be sent to members by email and announced at the meeting on 24 June. Many thanks to Maggie and Peter for once again hosting the event, and we hope to see you there!

Wednesday 17 September

(tbc) Meeting with German SPD @ venue tbc

Tuesday 14 October

John Fitzmaurice Memorial Lecture 2008 with Margot Wallstrom (below), Vice-President of the European Commission



BRUSSELS LABOUR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2008-2009

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Vice-chair: David Earnshaw

Secretary: Sarah Millar
(secretary@brusselslabour.org)

Treasurer: David O'Leary

Committee members:

Frazer Clarke

Emma Eatwell

Keir Fitch

Jacqui Hale

Stephen Kinsella

Tessa Ryan