



Germinal

The Sun may have set on Gordon - but the election is ours to win

CONFERENCE 2009

Labour in general, and Gordon Brown in particular, have been written off so many times in the last couple of years that it was great to see in Brighton a Party and a leader united and ready to take on the Tories, in what looks likely to be the hardest fought election in a generation.

The point that came over again and again at Conference was that the election is a choice between two parties, not a referendum on the Labour Government. And on the main policy choices, Labour has been right and the Tories wrong.

On the financial crisis, Labour intervened when the Tories would have left it to the markets. On global problems such as tackling climate change and world poverty, Labour has worked within the EU and with international partners, while the Tories would leave the UK isolated.

This year, the highlights from the conference floor included a feisty Peter Mandelson (certainly not a quitter, but has the Party learned to love him?) a combative Gordon Brown (whose speech fairly brimmed over with policy initiatives) and a David Miliband who was keen to make Europe an election-winning issue for Labour.

Not surprising, when one Tory MEP is expelled from the party for standing up to extremism, but another who says the NHS was a 60 year mistake and cites Enoch Powell as an inspiration gets promoted....

Oh and who were the international speakers at the two conferences? Labour had the honour of hosting the Prime Ministers of Spain and Norway.

In contrast, the Tories could only manage two MEPs, Michal Kaminski and Roberts Zile, who no one would have heard of but for the fact that their views and their associates are

controversial to say the least. (One thing the two have in common is that they support the Lisbon Treaty, which the Tories oppose!)



Away from the conference floor, the fringe and social activities were as lively as ever (in spite of the punch below the belt proffered by the Sun announcing its support for the Tories on the night of the Leader's Speech).

Highlights for me included the Go Fourth event on the eve of conference, with the clear message from John Prescott "Stop complaining, and start campaigning." The Party's "Twitter Tsar" Kerry McCarthy MP also highlighted the importance of new methods of communication in campaigns, and you'll find a livelier summary than mine of what conference was like at kerry-mccarthy.blogspot.com.

On the international side, in addition to the plenary speakers, there were nearly 300 international visitors who had their own programme of events. The meeting of Labour International took up much of the Saturday before conference.

The Brussels Labour fringe was not the only fringe event where Europe featured prominently: the Labour Movement for Europe held a lively fringe on the Sunday, and the Fabians had a meeting on "Winning the Election on Foreign Policy."

That brings me back to the main point: in the choice of governing parties that people will make next year, they will have to look closely at what the Tories stand for and who their allies abroad will be in pursuing Britain's interests. The general election may be the Tories' to lose. It's ours to win.

Frazer Clarke

In this issue



Annual conference
Labour meets in Brighton



European elections
The campaign and the new MEPs



Lisbon Treaty
Ireland's vote and the Tories' splits on Europe

Editorial

Brussels Labour has had a busy few months, campaigning in the European elections on both sides of the Channel and participating in Labour party conference, including our own breakfast meeting.

This edition of Germinal focuses on the election, the Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty and the recent Labour party conference.

If you have any suggestions, or would like to write an article for Germinal, please contact me at eatwell@gmail.com.

Happy reading!

Emma Eatwell

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Views expressed are those of the individual authors responsible, and not necessarily of Brussels Labour.

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Main parties go head-to-head in Brussels

In the run-up to the European elections, Brussels Labour co-organised a hustings event between representatives of the three major political parties: Richard Corbett for the Labour party, Andrew Duff for the Liberal Democrats, and Timothy Kirkhope for the Conservatives. The event was introduced by Brussels lawyer Ian Forrester, and kindly chaired by Belgian Thomas Tindermas.

The focus of the debate was more on institutional questions than politics but gave the audience an insight into the views of the participants and their view of the future of the European Parliament.

Questions included the candidates' views on the achievements of the 2004-2009 Parliament, and the challenges facing the next one.

Richard thought the key issue was how to regulate, but not over-regulate, the market. The centre-right wanted to leave too much to market forces, while the Tories were not even engaging in the EU debate on these issues, instead simply heading to the exit door. By contrast, Labour was at the centre of the debate.

Andrew Duff thought the EP had been proactive in influencing the Lisbon Treaty, which would result in a much more efficient Union. For the next Parliament, the EU budget would need to increase if the EU was to play a credible role in leading economic recovery.

Timothy Kirkhope thought the Parliament had succeeded in encouraging market opening and avoiding protectionism. For the future, he wanted more work on less and better regulation and delivering the climate change package.

Picking up on a popular theme, Tindermas asked what the European Union's next 'grand vision' should be:

Kirkhope again wanted market opening, better regulation, more use of impact assessments etc, so that the EU would be seen as part of the solution rather than the problem.

Richard stressed the need to deliver on climate change, where only action by the Union as a whole can hope to succeed. But he challenged

the Tories on why they were voting against climate change legislation.

As to whether the European Parliament needs further reform, Kirkhope thought it should not always seek more power and had to look closely at its internal expenses. Richard stressed the need for continuous democratic control of EU legislation – this is a precious thing where the EU is unique among international organisations, and means discussion is not simply between national positions. Regarding expenses, he pointed out that the deeply wasteful monthly trip to Strasbourg was imposed by a European Council chaired by John Major...



Andrew Duff considered the Parliament's biggest problem to be the lack of real pan-EU political parties. He thought we should have trans-national constituencies, to make it clear that EP was truly European.

Regarding groupings in the new Parliament, Kirkhope tried to insist that the Tories would have a wide range of allies on the centre-right, beyond the new group they were forming. Andrew Duff thought the liberals would be strengthened by Fina Fail and Guy Verhofstadt. Regarding the Tories, he considered their new group not only bad for them, but also for the UK. Richard agreed with this. Until now, the UK had played a leading role in the mainstream groups across the EP. Now it would lose considerable influence.

Very sadly, Richard lost his seat to the BNP in the subsequent election, so this was our last chance to hear him speak as an MEP, but we hope he will stay in close contact with Brussels Labour.

Keir Fitch

The campaign in Spain



Labour International on the Costa Blanca in Spain has among its members former MPs, Lords and other illustrious figures from the Labour movement. It is relatively wealthy and active. That at least is the picture in Costa Blanca North.

During the European elections I was asked to campaign with Labour International in Costa Blanca South. There it is a very different picture with membership pretty scarce. However, as I discovered, what they lack in quantity they make up for with hard work.

I met up with Sarah and Dee who seem to be the backbone of Labour activity locally. They have joined forces with PSOE and operate from their offices in a bar on Orihuela Costa. There I found a hive of activity with Spanish lessons being provided and English style political surgeries being held. Sarah and Dee have not just worked to boost the Labour Party there but also to get the local PSOE organisation revived in an area dominated by the right-wing Partido Popular (PP). They have linked up with local PSOE councillor, Rosa Martinez, a real live wire, to create a very effective campaigning organisation.

Most of their work is with the ex-pat community and not just the Brits. The problems there are considerable with all manner of heart-rending stories of bankrupt developers, construction work unfinished, and people without electricity in their new homes. The local PP-run council is largely indifferent to these difficulties.

Sarah and Dee organised a very full programme for me ending with a big public meeting. Their dedicated work proved a huge boost to my morale at such a difficult time.

Gary Tittle

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS **The campaign**

Campaigning in Islington North and Brussels

In the run-up to the European elections, Brussels Labour organised three campaign activities to support the Labour Party in London and the Parti Socialiste (PS) and SpA in Brussels.

In Brussels, about twelve of members of Brussels Labour met up on two evenings in May to leaflet the European district. Over 2000 leaflets were delivered in a very efficient and speedy fashion.

Because of restrictions on party funding, we were not able to contribute financially to the UK campaign but we helped in kind, notably joining in the canvassing effort in London. A small group of intrepid (and very brave!) Brussels Labour members spent a Sunday in North Islington leafleting and canvassing two local areas.

The campaign team included Claude Moraes MEP who came along, and as Jeremy Corbyn MP (whose constituency we were in), as well as local councillors and London Assembly Member Jennette Arnold. Highlights of the day included croissants chez David Poyser, a walk around Arsenal football ground, and signing up a new member to the party! Not bad considering the MP expenses scandal!



Campaigning in Islington North



Brussels Labour members relax with a drink after leafleting in Brussels

It is clear that Brussels Labour members are seasoned campaigners who enjoy a bit of fresh air and lively doorstep conversation. Many thanks to all those involved. Brussels Labour will be organising other campaigning days over in the UK in the run-up to the general election. If you are interested in taking part, please let a member of the executive know.

Jo Wood and Belinda Pyke

Getting out the vote

Brussels Labour divided its efforts on the European elections between support for Labour candidates in the UK and support for Socialist (PS and SP.a) candidates in Belgium, since some Brussels Labour members are still able to vote in either country while others can only vote in Belgium.

We sent reminders to members with information on how to ensure they were on the relevant register and also had a couple of letters published in the Bulletin. Unfortunately the percentage of those eligible to register who actually did so seems to have been lower than in the 2006 communal elections.

We don't know all the reasons but, in some cases, members had difficulty registering with their communes. We want to follow this up so please do let us know if this happened to you.

Belinda Pyke

Results

| | | | |
|----------------|------------|--------------|-----------|
| | EU | | |
| S&D | 184 | G/EFA | 55 |
| EPP | 265 | ECR | 54 |
| ALDE | 84 | GUE | 35 |
| | | EFD | 32 |
| | | NI | 27 |

Belgium

| | |
|--|----------------|
| S&D (PS, SP.a) | 5 seats |
| EPP (CDH, CD&V, CSP) | 5 seats |
| ALDE (MR, Open VLD) | 5 seats |
| Greens/EFA (Ecolo, Groen!, NVA) | 4 seats |
| ECR (Lijst Dedecker) | 1 seat |
| Non-attached (Vlaams Belang) | 2 seats |

UK

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| S&D (Labour) | 13 seats |
| ECR (Conservatives, Ulster Un.) | 26 seats |
| ALDE (Liberal Democrats) | 11 seats |
| Greens/EFA (Greens, SNP, Plaid) | 5 seats |
| GUE/NGL (Sinn Fein) | 1 seat |
| EFD (UKIP) | 13 seats |
| Non-attached (BNP, DUP) | 3 seats |

First impressions of the European Parliament

Alan Kelly MEP

On 9th September, Brussels Labour welcomed another new MEP. Alan Kelly has just been elected as an Irish Member of the European Parliament and is full of energy and enthusiasm. When elected, he saw his first duty as securing a 'yes' in the second Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty and was campaigning hard to do that.

Alan treated Brussels Labour to a lively and interesting meeting, where we had the opportunity to gain an insight into the politics in Ireland and an understanding as to why the Irish voted first time round.



According to Alan, Irish voters are aware of the benefits of being part of the EU but over the last 10 years doubts have crept in and they have started to take the EU for granted. Even though Alan recognises the challenges of getting the positive messages across in a country where air time must be split equally between the two camps, he believes that referenda are

healthy. The one thing he was adamant about was that the campaign had to be an Irish campaign, without outside interference.

Alan and the 'yes' campaign obviously did a good job, as the Irish voted in favour of the Lisbon Treaty on 2nd October!

Derek Vaughan MEP

Brussels Labour was delighted to welcome the Derek Vaughan to his first engagement since becoming the new Labour MEP for Wales. For the first time, BL members were asked to introduce themselves, to show Derek that branch meetings in Brussels are a little different to those back home.

Derek gave us some background on his political career and thanked BL for making the effort to travel to the UK to campaign for the Labour Party. He had his own views on why the results were so bad for the Party, accepting that a range of factors had to be taken into account but clearly the resignation of Ministers in the run-up to election day did not help.

Derek believes that the Party needs a clear,

radical, bold message to take to the electorate to turn around our current woes. We also need to expose our opponents for what they are, including the true consequences of the Tories' decision to leave the EPP Group.



Our speaker broached the tricky subject of how to engage with the BNP now that they have elected members in the EP. Whilst confirming that he would not share a platform with such people, he does think that we need a discussion about how to handle them. Equally, the consequences of electing nationalists to the EP need to be exposed.

Derek's interests lie in the Budgets and Regional Development committees and he plans to put communication with his constituents at the top of his agenda – especially on positive messages about the EU!

The energy and commitment of the new Labour MEP for Wales is very welcome and we look forward to working with him.

Emma Eatwell

Aid and trade - Europe's and the developing world

Over 50 people attended the International Breakfast hosted by Brussels Labour in Brighton. This is hardly a surprise considering that the speakers included Baroness Glenys Kinnock, Europe Minister (now Minister for Africa), Baroness Cathy Ashton, European Commissioner for Trade and Michael Cashman MEP.

The session was chaired by Lord Kinnock, who facilitated a lively, passionate session on the EU's aid and trade policy.

Michael Cashman talked about the challenge of dealing with the impact on developing countries of both climate change and the financial crisis. He argued that the EU and the world needs to take collective responsibility to solve both crises. The World Bank and the IMF need reforming, and new money needs to be found to tackle climate change - something that Labour is committed to, but the Conservatives

clearly are not.

The Minister explained that we were at the mid-point of reaching the Millennium Development Goals, the deadline for which is 2015, and the world still has a lot to do. In her view, aid does work and she listed a number of examples such as health, where appropriate funding had helped deliver antiretrovirals and reduced the number of people dying of HIV. She agreed with Michael's view that new money is needed and set out the UK Government plans to spend 10% of new overseas development money on tackling climate change.

The Commissioner explained that her objective is to end poverty through liberalising trade. With the recession, trade and finance have collapsed. She believes that this is an opportunity to improve trade, by giving developing countries access to European mar-

kets, by helping them to improve infrastructure and produce goods and services which meet European standards. Completing the Doha trade round will be critical in this regard.

The discussion was lively. The speakers all agreed that aid and trade go hand in hand, that the current economic and environmental challenges are drying the debate but that respect of human rights had to be at the foundation of any aid and trade policy developed by the European Union.

In conclusion, Lord Kinnock thanked the speakers and made a joke that the panel included one more peer than in Brighton. Michael Cashman had the last word by reminding the audience the panel was made up of 'three peers and a queer'!

Jo Wood

A spectre haunts David Cameron



Emma Reynolds

The scars of Black Wednesday run deep with most Conservatives but the experience is particularly potent for Cameron who was at Norman Lamont's side on that fateful day, witnessing at close hand the humiliating exit of the Pound from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism.

Four years ago, the spectre returned once more during his leadership bid. In order to secure support from the right of his party, he judged it necessary to make a commitment to withdraw Tory MEPs from the European People's Party.

Europe's ghost is back again at Cameron's side. In the wake of the Irish 'yes' vote on the Lisbon Treaty, the Tory leader promised a referendum if the treaty was not ratified at the time of the general election. He refused to set out his position on a post-ratification treaty on the basis that he did not want to prejudice the result in Poland and the Czech Republic (the only remaining non-ratifiers).

The intentional ambiguity of the Cameron fudge that "we will not let matters rest there" was clearly lost on London's Mayor, Boris Johnson. He put a spanner in the works by suggesting that the appointment of Tony Blair as the new EU President underlined the need for a referendum. So now (at the time of writing), senior Tory figures are suggest-



Is the Tory leader sending the right message to Britain's EU partners?

ing that Cameron will rule out a post-ratification referendum but this internal wrangling and vacillation is the last thing he wanted during his conference week.

Party politics aside, the prospect of a post-ratification referendum should the Conservatives win the next general election is extremely worrying. Let's be honest about the consequences, even if Cameron will not. If a Tory Government in its first term in office holds a referendum and then actively campaigns for a 'no' vote and succeeds, the UK's position as a member of the European Union would be untenable. Can we trust Cameron not to cave in to the pressure from his party's hardline euro-sceptics?

Regardless of what happens next, Cameron's relations with the UK's key European partners, German Chancellor Merkel and French President Sarkozy have been severely strained. The damage has already been done. He is at odds with Merkel and Sarkozy on his withdrawal from the European People's Party, his position on the Lisbon Treaty and his opposition to Blair's appointment.

This year has been dominated by key international negotiations – the G20 in London and then Pittsburgh, and the upcoming Copenhagen summit on climate change. Should he be elected Prime Minister next year, Cameron's isolation in the world would put at risk the success of these global agreements and the UK's role in forging them.

Little Englander attitudes in a globalised world are absurd. Isolation jeopardises our international standing as well as our economic prosperity, given that some sixty per cent of our exports go to other European countries. The Irish voters this weekend understood this argument loud and clear.

Yet another good reason to get back out on the doorstep. May the fight-back continue. Our future in Europe and our economy depend upon it.

Emma Reynolds is Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Wolverhampton North East and former Treasurer of Brussels Labour.

www.emmareynolds.org.uk

This is a shortened version of an article originally published on www.progressonline.org.uk.

Ireland votes yes

Fifteen months after they plunged the EU into a new crisis with their rejection of the Lisbon Treaty, Irish voters voted 'yes' to the Lisbon Treaty on 2 October by 67.1% to 32.9%.

A better-run campaign helped secure victory (as did assurances from EU leaders). High-profile support from Pat Cox, a former EP President (and perhaps Ireland's next commissioner), as well as from actors, singers, sportsmen and entrepreneurs, helped seal a 'yes' vote. The treaty's opponents – Sinn Féin, hardline anti-abortion groups, some Greens, and Declan Ganley (who only took part in the 'no' campaign in the latter stages) failed to inspire as they did in June 2008.

With Poland's ratification now complete as well, attention turns to the Czechs. With the country's president, Vaclav Klaus, refusing to sign, and a new legal challenge about to be assessed, the prospects for the treaty look worrying. However, the Czech government seems keen for the issue to be resolved quickly, and hopes that ratification should be concluded by the end of the year. Should this turn out to be the case, there is a clear loser from the Irish 'yes' vote: the Tories, plunged, once again, into crisis on Europe – and on the eve of their conference.

David Cameron was desperate not to answer the 'what if?' question about his plans should the treaty be in force after the general election next year. Cowed by the Euro-phobes, but not wanting to promise a futile referendum, he dithers. The Tories may not be divided on the EU as they once were – the Europhiles have been marginalised or adopted a vow of silence.

However they are in a muddle. Should they win the election, do they really want to re-open Lisbon or repatriate powers? Do they want to spend time on these issues in the opening months of a new government, with a troubled economy and rising unemployment? Polls show that a large number of people want a referendum – but polls also show that Europe is not the biggest priority.

So the Tory obsession with Europe sees the light of day again – and presents another opportunity to Labour to show that they haven't changed one bit.

David O'Leary

Labour International - get yourself online

Labour International, the Constituency Party for overseas members worldwide, elected a new Co-ordinating Committee (LICC) earlier this year. For the full election results, go to <http://tr.im/BG5F>.

LICC held its Annual General Meeting at Party Conference in Brighton and confirmed as its officers:

Chair: Jeremy Millard (Denmark)
jeremy.millard@teknologisk.dk

Vice-Chair: Maggie Coulthard (Belgium)
maggie_coulthard@hotmail.com

Secretary: Lorraine Hardy (Spain)
thehardys42@gmail.com

Treasurer/membership: Frazer Clarke (Bel.)
frazer.clarke@gmail.com

The other LICC members elected are:

Terry Kendellen (France)
terrykendellen@hotmail.com

Sylvia Moore (France)
Ssindamanoy@aol.com

LI was entitled to send two delegates to Conference this year. They were Valerie Hargreaves (Spain) and Alex Powell (Isle of Man).

During the election campaign I expressed a number of concerns about the organisation of LI. So that LI can obtain full recognition and rights as an "ordinary" CLP, the new committee is working on reforms that will bring LI fully into line with usual Labour Party practice.

We are also looking at a blueprint for LI activities, revitalising the branch structure, planning a new website and most importantly, considering how we can best contribute to Labour winning the forthcoming general election.

Having taken over as Treasurer at the AGM, I noted that Labour International's expenditure appears to have substantially exceeded

its income in recent years. The committee is also looking at how to improve LI's finances, and here's how you can help.

Firstly, one of LI's main outgoings is on mailings, so if you have an email address and have not yet given it to the Party or LI, please do so now. You can let me have your email address for the Party (or ask me if you're not sure) at frazer.clarke@gmail.com.

You can also change your details through membersnet on the Party website - go to <http://members.labour.org.uk>.

If the Party has your email, you should already have had a number of recent emails from Lorraine Hardy).

Secondly, LI's main income is from the share it receives of members' Party subscriptions (about £8 for standard rate members). If you have retained your CLP membership in the UK, please consider transferring to Labour International. Again you can do this through membersnet, or by contacting Membership at the Party. You can also get a friend signed up to the Party!

I'm very hopeful that with a new committee in place, after a fully contested election, Labour International can make a full contribution to Party policy-making and campaigning. It also has the potential to help represent the Labour Party overseas and to its sister parties in particular.

Thank you for your support if you voted for me in the LI election. I'm hesitant to ask you to do more to help, but with an election a few months away and a rampant Tory party keen to slash and burn public services, and to isolate the UK from its international partners, there could not be a better time for you to do your bit.

Frazer Clarke

Work for the PES

The Party of European Socialists is recruiting a Political Advisor on Economic and Financial Policy and a Media Advisor.

Details of the two posts are available on the EurActiv Jobs website - go to <http://tr.im/BGvJ>.

The deadline for applications for both posts is 20 October.

Summer Social

Brussels Labour held a wonderful and well-attended Summer Social in July. Thank you to all of those who joined us, and to Maggie Coulthard and Peter Wragg for hosting the event once again.

The Christmas social will take place on Wednesday 9th December. More details will follow in due course.

Next meetings

14 October: John Fitzmaurice memorial lecture, to be delivered by John Monks,



General Secretary of the ETUC
The Centre, Avenue Marnix, from 1930

18 November: Branch meeting with guest speaker

Arthur's, Rue de Treves, from 1930

9 December: Christmas Social, hosted by David Earnshaw and Jo Wood

Square Ambiorix 6, from 1930

Brussels Labour online

The Brussels Labour website, containing information about the branch and how to join it, as well as news and recent issues of *Germinal*, is available at www.brusselslabour.org. Your feedback on the site is welcome!

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 2009-2010

Chair: Belinda Pyke
(chair@brusselslabour.org)

Vice-chair: David Earnshaw

Secretary: Sarah Millar
(secretary@brusselslabour.org)

Treasurer: David O'Leary

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

Executive 2009-2010

If you have not yet done so, please remember to pay your subscriptions for 2009 (€25 waged, €5 stagiaire/unwaged).

Bank account:
BNP Paribas Fortis 001-1128765-52.

If you have recently changed your postal contact details, please let us know:
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