

Richard Corbett MEP

Labour Member of the European Parliament
for Yorkshire & Humber

Quarterly Report

Autumn 2017

Welcome to my autumn report.

2017 has continued to be a very busy year, with Brexit the central issue of British politics.



1. My Task as Labour's New Leader in Europe

In October, I was elected as Leader of our Labour MEPs, succeeding the excellent Glenis Willmott who has retired. This role involves representing our party in the European Parliament, within and beyond the Socialist Group, as well as attending Jeremy Corbyn's shadow cabinet in Westminster, the shadow cabinet Brexit sub-committee and also sitting on Labour's NEC.

It is not without irony that, with the UK on the brink of leaving the EU, our relationship with Europe is probably talked about more now than at any time in the past forty years. And almost daily, more and more 'unforeseen' problems about ending this relationship are in the news. Some are systemic, like what happens to the Europe-wide rules that protect workers, consumers and the environment (the very reason for right-wing hostility to the EU) which many Tories want to repeal.

Some are sector specific – like the impact of additional customs checks on vital just-in-time supply chains in our manufacturing industries if we leave the customs union. Some are very personal, like what happens to the rights of EU citizens resident in Britain and UK citizens resident in other EU countries. Some are minor but numerous, like what happens to pet passports or roaming charges. Some are major if they aren't properly sorted out prior to any Brexit, like losing landing rights in Europe and beyond for all UK based airlines. And some, like losing the benefits of the single market, could sink our economy and our public finances, making the task of implementing Labour's programme in government much more difficult.

What is increasingly apparent is the sheer multitude of issues involved and their complexity – which is where our team of Labour

MEPs, with their knowledge, experience and expertise, can really help to inform the debate. And make no mistake about it: the Brexit debate will get ever more intense as we approach 2019.

As time moves on, it's less about the principle of what Labour should have done in response to last year's referendum, it's increasingly about how we react to the actual Tory Brexit next year – with its likely bad deal, or even a no-deal cliff edge. It's less about what we might have done if a Labour government were negotiating, as set out in our election manifesto, it's about avoiding a catastrophe for the country as a result of the Tory government's combination of incompetence and malevolence.

Tory divisions and rivalries are making it impossible for the government to negotiate effectively. Hard right Tories want not just to leave the EU, but sever all ties with our European partners in pursuit of their dream of a low tax, deregulated, offshore economy, not bound by any of those rules that protect workers, consumers and the environment. They claim that the economic havoc of a hard Brexit would be a price worth paying and that the UK would rebound. But we know

that it is the most vulnerable who would pay the price and some of the richest who would reap the benefits – if indeed there are any. As we said at this year's party conference, Labour "has grave concerns about the impact a reckless Tory Brexit, which opens the way for a race to the bottom in standards and corporate taxes, will have on our economy and society."

These concerns are increasingly shared by many who voted Leave. Very few Leave voters voted for Brexit-at-any-cost. After all, they were promised it would bring in money, which would all go to the NHS. But as the Tory Brexit is in fact turning out to be a costly exercise, damaging our economy, those voters are entitled to complain that what they voted for is not what is being delivered. As are those who were hoping for shiny new trade deals, a sharp decline in immigration, or any of the other promises made by the increasingly discredited Leave campaign. It is significant that, according to polls, public opinion has not rallied as expected behind the referendum result (like most politicians have). On its side, the EU has confirmed, through the President of the European Council Donald Tusk, that "**deal, no deal or no Brexit**" is up to Britain.

2. Labour Party Annual Conference

In September I attended party conference where I spoke on panels, participated in numerous fringe debates and had several media interviews. As always it was an excellent opportunity to catch up with friends and colleagues in the Labour family, and listen to a range of views from our party members.

There was a very lively atmosphere within the main conference hall and many of the fringe events were hugely over subscribed. Many members were attending for the very first time and there was a remarkable energy and enthusiasm carried over from removing Theresa May's majority in June.

Although much was made about a Conference decision not to have a specific debate about Brexit, it of course came up in the context of many debates and a resolution was adopted. There were also dozens of fringe events around Brexit, exploring the many costly

and complex problems that it was creating and the threats to our economy, our rights and our environment.

As well as attending other meetings and events, I also went along to the Yorkshire and Humber reception on Sunday evening, where I enjoyed the opportunity to speak with constituents about my work and catch up with many of you.



A chance encounter with Newsnight's Nick Watt during party conference

I have written a series of **Brexit Briefings** that clarify some of the legal implications and explain in detail the impact on different sectors:

<http://www.richardcorbett.org.uk/category/brexit-briefings/>

My blog continues to address current issues, whether Brexit related or not: <http://www.richardcorbett.org.uk/category/blog>

3. Making Changes for Careers, Hull

In October, Linda McAvan and I visited the Making Changes for Careers (MC4C) programme in Hull. MC4C do sterling work helping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds get back into work and start up their own businesses. They provide one-to-one advice and follow-up, based on the experience of staff who have come from disadvantaged backgrounds themselves and started their own businesses. They also coach their recruits on how to become mentors for others and work with the DWP and Sage to provide practical, back-to-work training.

However, crucial funding from the European Social Fund (ESF), which helps them do this work, will come to an end if we leave the EU. Moreover, it is not clear whether or how the government intend to replace European funding for these vital programmes.

We had the privilege of meeting some of MC4C's young entrepreneurs on the day, whose businesses included jewelry, graphic design, children's clothes and baby changing bags, and children's education in how to treat and keep reptiles as pets. I even got to meet a snake!



4. Yorkshire and Humber Regional Policy Forum

This year's Labour Party Regional Policy Forum on Europe, hosted by Linda McAvan and me in Hull, focused on the current state of play in the Brexit negotiations and the potential impact Brexit will have on the Yorkshire & Humber economy. More than a hundred Labour Party members attended and we had seven other guest speakers.

On the negotiations, I discussed how the government's chaotic approach is viewed in the European Parliament and what all the likely scenarios are in terms of soft, hard or no-deal Brexit, or indeed no Brexit at all. Linda reminded the attendees that the EU27 had more pressing priorities than Brexit and were looking at ways of creating a more socially equal Europe and tackling urgent supranational issues such as

the refugee crisis, support for development and combatting climate change.

On the Yorkshire & Humber economy, we had experts from IPPR North, BASF Bradford, Leeds Beckett University and local government. Overall, the outlook is not good. With our regional economy already starved of investment from central government, the prospect of costly customs tariffs post-Brexit as well as the loss of vital EU funding and a reduction in the number of migrant workers would have a detrimental impact on the region. There was also huge concern across the sectors over the lack of clarity and certainty from the government on future regulatory arrangements and on consumer, workers' and citizens' rights.



Speaking to Yorkshire Labour members at the Regional Policy Forum in Hull



Paul Blomfield MP, Linda McAvan MEP, Veronica Hardstaff (chair) and Richard Corbett taking questions about the EU and Brexit from the audience (below)



5. Social Media

Members may be aware that I have an informative website – richardcorbett.org.uk – with a blog to which I add several articles a month, and you can follow me on Twitter [@RCorbettMEP](https://twitter.com/RCorbettMEP) (where I have nearly 40,000 followers) and on Facebook: facebook.com/rcorbett/

I was also the first UK politician to develop an app, Doorstep EU, which can be downloaded to iPhones and Android devices.

For almost three years I have used this to provide factual information and regular rebuttal of incorrect news items on Europe and Brexit.

Doorstep EU App

For up-to-the-minute analysis of media headlines on Europe and briefings on unfolding issues. Scan the QR code to the right, or go to: richardcorbett.org.uk/app



6. Brexit and Agriculture Debate, York



In early November I spoke at an event in York, organised by the National Farmers' Union and the European Parliament UK office, looking at what Brexit will mean for agriculture. It was extremely instructive to talk with farmers, NFU officials and agriculture students about their concerns regarding the Brexit negotiations.

Over the course of the event, four main areas of concern emerged:

- future trade agreements (which could lead to lower standard imports undercutting British produce)
- potential loss of income for farmers (as the government has still not indicated how it will replace CAP funding which provides more than half of farmers' income)

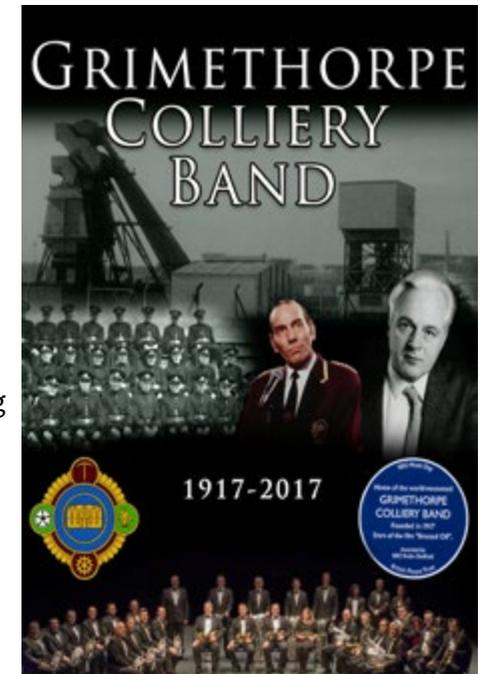
- the availability of EU migrant workers (including for seasonal work)
- and possible changes to food standards.

Farmers have to plan years in advance for crops, livestock and equipment, and the current uncertainty is creating tremendous levels of concern about the future of the industry and individuals in this sector. Many attendees discussed concerns about their ability to be able to find work or maintain a secure financial footing in the industry post-Brexit. Yorkshire has a large and successful agricultural sector. These workers and businesses deserve far better from their government, not this ideologically driven chaotic Brexit that the divided cabinet is inflicting upon them.

7. Grimethorpe Colliery Band Centenary Concert

As its Honorary President, I had the privilege of attending the Centenary Concert of the Grimethorpe Colliery Band, held in the Elsecar Heritage Centre in October. Current and past members of the band, staff, their families, composers and the director of the film *Brassed Off* were all in attendance. The band is still going strong and is internationally acclaimed, building on a strong tradition, positively encouraging young performers and taking brass band music forward to a new era.

As well as concerts and competitions, the band is available to play at suitable events. Anyone interested in hiring them should contact David Horn at: manager@grimethorpeband.com



The band take their bow after an incredible performance (below)



8. Constituents' Issues

As ever, the dark shadow of Brexit looms large in my postbag. Constituents are increasingly worried about the Tory government's chaotic approach to the negotiations and the potential economic impact of a 'hard' or 'no-deal' Brexit. This is especially the case with constituents who work in manufacturing, transport, universities, agriculture and finance. Constituents from other EU countries living here are deeply concerned about how Brexit will affect their rights, particularly the rights to residence, work, pensions and access to healthcare. I believe that the Tory government should guarantee these rights, rather than using people as bargaining chips in the negotiations.

Constituents have also contacted me about other issues, such as:

- The referendum in Catalonia and the shocking police violence that took place. For my thoughts on this, please read my blog: richardcorbett.org.uk/catalonia-referendum/
- Human rights issues such as the treacherous conditions facing refugees crossing

the Mediterranean, the horrendous treatment of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and the arrest of human rights activists in Iran

- Various animal rights issues including the mislabelling of fur and its possible connection with the dog meat trade in China, the treatment of stray dogs in Romania and other Eastern European countries, and bird trapping in Malta and Cyprus
- EU regulatory and legislative matters, expressing concerns about, for instance, the possible re-authorisation of glyphosate on the EU market and proposals for copyright in the Digital Single Market Directive.

If you have any concerns you would like to raise with me regarding the EU, or issues where you require my assistance as your elected representative in the European parliament, please telephone my Leeds office on:

0113 243 0554

Or email:

richard@richardcorbett.org.uk

9. Visits, Events & Meetings (* = as speaker)

In Yorkshire & Humber:

West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Bradford
Open Britain: Leeds*
Open Britain: York*
Leeds for Europe*
Making Changes for Careers*, Hull
York for Europe*
Grimethorpe Centenary Concert
Regional Policy Forum*, Hull
Brexit & Agriculture Debate*, York
Y&H European Movement AGM*, Leeds
Question Time*, Athelstan Community Primary School, Sherburn in Elmet

CLPs:

Shipley
Morley & Outwood*
Calder Valley*
East Yorkshire*
Richmond*
Huddersfield*
Hull East*
Skipton & Ripon*
Halifax*

Rest of UK:

Stop Brexit rally & street party, Manchester
Shadow Cabinet
Keir Starmer
Labour Lords Brexit team
Hugo Dixon – InFacts

Labour Party Conference, Brighton:

- Talk Radio with Stephen Kinnock MP on addressing concerns about immigration
- Rally organised by Brighton for Europe, attended by several thousand people
- Labour Movement for Europe event – *Brexit: the Future of Britain and Europe*
- LabourList and TSSA rally for free movement
- Labour Against Brexit meeting with Seb Dance MEP, Heidi Alexander MP, Alison McGovern MP, Rupa Huq MP and Chuka Umunna MP
- EEF (Manufacturers' Organisation: Engineering) Brexit Roundtable

In European Parliament:

Sri Lankan Ambassador
Journalism students from Sheffield University*
Centre for European Studies
Drax
Nepalese and Bhutanese Ambassadors
BEPACT Summer University*
EU Ambassador for Sri Lanka and Maldives
Guy Verhofstadt
Hilary Benn MP, Brexit Select Committee Chair
European Beer Consumers' Union
Leaving reception for Glenis Willmott
UK Freight Transport Association

Head of Netherlands Brexit taskforce & Dutch coordinator for Brexit negotiations
No more fisheries management after Brexit?
Interparliamentary meeting with Bhutan parliament
Jeremy Corbyn & Keir Starmer
Liz Nash visitors' group
ULB students*
HoC Select Committee lunch
Hosted Law Society

Mission to Maldives and Sri Lanka, government and opposition leaders

Media appearances included:

BBC Sunday Politics – Yorks & Lincs
BBC Daily Politics
BBC Radio Leeds – Hotseat Hour
LBC Radio
BBC News 24
Sky News

Articles published in media including:

The Independent
Labour List
Left Foot Forward
New Statesman
SERA (Labour's Environment Campaign)
Tribune

You can contact me by email:

richard@richardcorbett.org.uk

My website is updated regularly with my blog, briefings, news, views and analysis on EU and Labour Party topics:

www.richardcorbett.org.uk

Follow me on Twitter:

[@rcorbettmep](https://twitter.com/rcorbettmep)

Follow & 'like' my Facebook Page:

www.facebook.com/rcorbett/

Catch up on the work of my fellow MEPs in the European Parliamentary Labour Party:

www.eurolabour.org.uk

Please email me if you would like a printed copy of this report or a version in large print.