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Labour Member of the European Parliament
for Yorkshire & Humber

Quarterly Report

Spring 2018



1. Brexit: Conservative Chaos and Confusion Continues

Brexit continues to be a turbulent and complex process, with government splits, broken promises, chaos and confusion dominating the headlines. Most recently, defeats for the government in the House of Lords on various amendments on the EU Withdrawal Bill have ensured that there will be fierce debates in the House of Commons when the Bill returns for its second reading later in the spring.

As a member of the European Parliament's Constitutional Committee dealing with Brexit on the one hand, and on the other, attending the Labour Shadow Cabinet (and its Brexit subcommittee), I have a ringside view of events and participate in discussions at both ends.

Whereas UK ministers set out positions in often vague (and contradictory) speeches, the EU does so in relatively clear and precise documents. At the start of this second stage of negotiations, they drafted a document putting the phase one ("divorce") agreement into legal format, set out their positions on a transition and on how they envisage the future relationship with Britain, assuming we go ahead with Brexit. The phase one agreement, far from being fully agreed, was colour coded, indicating where there was general agreement (green) where there is still detail to work out (yellow) and where there does not seem to be a solution in sight (white). So, even the much heralded phase one is actually far from settled.

The UK government is expected to put forward a proposal for the land border in **Ireland** before the next European Council summit of the heads of government of all member states (including Leo Varadkar of Ireland, of course) at the end of June. The rest of Europe is waiting with bated breath to hear how you can turn that border into a customs border, as the government intends, without having customs controls!

On the future relationship, the EU is clear that the UK government's own red lines – ruling out the customs union, single market, or any role for the European Court in settling any legal disputes about jointly agreed rules – mean the only deal left open for the UK outside the EU is that of a low level Free Trade Agreement, which will result in more barriers and less trade than now. Even the government's own figures show that a FTA will **seriously damage the economy**.

The government's position would also fail to protect the workplace, consumer, and environmental rights and standards that UK citizens currently enjoy, which is a major concern for Labour, but also for other EU countries who fear that Britain will trigger a race to the bottom in such standards. This

is of particular concern to the TUC and the trades union movement, who expressed their concerns at national and regional conferences that I attended in April (see p.8).

Having ruled out option after option, preferring to appease the Brexit hardliners in her party, it is increasingly clear that whatever 'deal' Theresa May comes back with will be a job-destroying Brexit with less trade, diminished rights and a high cost to the exchequer – a future that **bears no resemblance to the promises made by Leave campaign** at the time of the referendum and by Brexit ministers at the start of the negotiations.

The impact on the NHS is also of real concern as fewer European health professionals come to work in the UK and many of those already here are considering leaving, and the government is pulling us out of the EU frameworks for cooperation on medicines. Shadow Health Secretary Jonathan Ashworth MP gave a speech in the European Parliament saying "the NHS would not function effectively if it was not for the thousands of European nationals who work in it". The speech came the same day that the NHS Staff Survey exposed the reality behind the Brexiters'

claims that leaving the EU would result in more money, resources and staff for the NHS. The reality is that Brexit will damage the NHS and add to the pressures on our underpaid and overworked NHS staff. I have written about other impacts of Brexit on the NHS in a blog on my website: *When Brexit Becomes A Matter of Life and Death*.

Labour is committed to opposing a deal that does not meet its six red lines and is fighting to keep us in a customs union with no hard border in Ireland. Jeremy Corbyn's Coventry speech in February sparked significant interest across Europe about Labour's position, seen as being clearer and more

realistic than the government's pronouncements. Defeating a damaging and costly Tory Brexit deal when it comes back to be voted on in the Commons could also trigger an early election, if this miserable government has not fallen before then. There are also increasing calls for a vote on the final deal to be put to the public. **Public opinion has not rallied behind the result** of the referendum, as might have been expected – in fact it has edged the other way as disillusioned Brexit voters have second thoughts.

Whatever happens, it increasingly looks like Brexit will have to be re-negotiated or re-considered entirely later in the year.



Joining fellow Yorkshire & Humber MEP Linda McAvan's Campaign for Fair Trade alongside some of my Labour parliamentary colleagues

2. Participating in Labour's debate on Brexit

I am often asked how party members can engage in debate about the party's position on Brexit, for example:

Should we actively call now for a referendum on the final deal?

Should we lay down extra tests for the deal, such as staying in the single market?

Party members and Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) can make submissions to the National Policy Forum. Here's how:

Go to the policy forum website at policyforum.labour.org.uk/commissions.

Login using your email and Labour Party membership number.

On the homepage, click 'Get Involved' then click 'Make a Submission'.

Then input the following information:

Title: Brexit

Commission: International

Categories: Brexit

Then write your submission and click 'Submit'.

CLPs may, of course, also table contemporary motions for the annual party conference in September.

The deadline for submission is 13th September.

For further specialised discussions, Members may also be interested in joining the Labour Movement for Europe, a socialist society affiliated to the Labour Party, at laboureurope.eu



3. European Parliament Updates

The sitting Socialists and Democrats Group leader, Gianni Pittella, was elected to the Italian Senate in their national elections. So, in February we elected the German MEP Udo Bullmann to replace him. All the Labour MEPs will continue working with our comrades in this group to ensure our voice is heard on the key issues relating to Brexit and Europe more widely. Some of the key issues recently discussed are covered in the next few pages.

Meanwhile, the cracks in the Tory Party continue to emerge. At last month's European Parliament Brexit debate, only two Tory MEPs dared show their face! This comes after two other Tory MEPs, Julie Girling (South West) and Richard Ashworth (South East), left the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Group to join the centre-right European People's Party (EPP). Their defections highlight just how divided the Conservatives are, with no plan, no majority and no allies.

Pulse fishing vote

Labour MEPs voted in the European Parliament against extending electric shock "pulse fishing". This followed a huge

campaign by environmental groups, anglers and many constituents who were concerned that this kind of fishing, where an electric pulse is discharged causing fish to spasm up into nets, may be more damaging for the environment and other marine life than the traditional trawler method. The EU currently has a 5% limit on this kind of fishing because of the lack of research into its effects on marine life. Our vote blocked proposals to lift the current strict limits on this practice.

Green energy vote

The EP recently voted to set higher energy efficiency and renewable energy targets for EU countries. Labour MEPs backed a target for 35% of the EU's energy mix to come from renewables by 2030. On energy efficiency, the proposals also called for a target of 35%. However, Tory MEPs were part of a vote that blocked more ambitious targets of 40% and to make these binding at a national level. MEPs also want to avoid the unsustainable use of biomass in renewable energy where there are better industrial or material uses.

3. European Parliament Updates [continued]

US steel tariffs

Following Donald Trump's announcement of plans to impose tariffs on the import of steel and aluminium into the US, the EU threatened retaliatory action (which it is better able to do than individual states because of its size). Labour MEPs have long supported EU action to protect Europe's steel industries, including the thousands of workers employed in the sector in Britain, but these were previously opposed by the government. In an ironic twist, Liam Fox has stated that he will now be cooperating with the EU in responding to Trump's steel tariffs. Latest news is that Trump has for now backed down faced with united European pressure and postponed the tariffs.

Roaming charges may return

Theresa May said that the UK would leave the EU's Digital Single Market (DSM). The DSM aims to eliminate digital regulatory barriers among EU member states, including data roaming charges. The Department of Culture, Media & Sport has since confirmed this would likely entail the restoration of roaming charges, unless a deal

could be reached to the contrary. The European Parliament has led on the abolition of roaming costs, and in April, legislation came into effect to enable consumers to stream their online subscribed content, like Netflix, on their laptops and mobile phones while in another EU country, paying the same rate for this service as they would do at home. But in leaving the DSM with Brexit, these rights are likely to go.

EU air quality standards

Britain must not diverge from EU air quality standards if it leaves the European Union, Labour MEPs warned, after the UK government suffered yet another court defeat over its inadequate plans to tackle air pollution because they would result in levels that are illegal under EU laws we signed up to. It is the third victory against the government for environmental campaigners over inadequate proposals for reducing levels of harmful nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). The European Commission is currently looking into what action to take over Britain's repeated failure to comply with our EU air pollution laws.

3. European Parliament Updates [continued]

Tax Avoidance

Labour MEPs supported the formation of a new European Parliament committee to investigate tax avoidance, specifically in the digital sector, to tackle the ongoing issues around companies like Amazon and Google. EU finance ministers have also recently unveiled new measures to bolster tax

transparency. Labour MEPs believe it is vital the UK backs EU action against tax avoidance, and keeps any new measures even if it leaves the European Union. (New EU legislation on tax avoidance will come into effect in April 2019, just as we are due to leave the EU. Coincidence?)

Q: How many Tory Brexit ministers does it take to change a lightbulb?

A: One to promise a brighter future and all the rest to screw it up!

4. Social Media

Readers may be aware that I have an informative website – richardcorbett.org.uk – where I post several blogs and articles a month. You can follow me on Twitter [@RCorbettMEP](https://twitter.com/RCorbettMEP) (I now have around 45,000 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 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



5. Brexit: Fisheries and Seafood Debate, Grimsby

In March, I spoke at a well attended event in Grimsby Town Hall bringing together the various stakeholders in the fisheries sector. Although the town voted Leave, it is becoming clear that the versions of Brexit that many people were told would be available are not going to happen. Any potential gains in Britain's share of fish catches (itself not

so simple to achieve) will be outweighed by the lost trade if we leave the customs union, as the government intends. Given that we export 80% of the fish we catch, and most of this to the EU, this is a dire prospect, not just for fishers, but for the even greater number employed in the fish processing industry in Grimsby and elsewhere.

6. Labour and TUC Conferences



My speech to the Yorkshire Labour conference was about the effects of Brexit on the region and can be [read here](#).

I also spoke on Brexit at the TUC Yorkshire AGM in Harrogate in March, and at their Conference on Brexit in Leeds. It is clear from talking to delegates, as well as General Secretary Frances O'Grady and their lead officer on Brexit, Owen Tudor, that workers have much to be concerned about from Brexit, both as regards rights (the 'Henry VIII' powers the government is seeking, which it could use to remove hard won employment rights) and as regards jobs and income, if we leave the customs union and single market.

7. Local Elections



Campaigning across the region for for Dan Jarvis for Sheffield City Region Mayor with Ed Miliband (above); Sabiya Khan in Wibsey with Ralph Berry (right); and Vanda Greenwood in Shipley with Susan Hinchcliffe & Alex Ross-Shaw (below).



Labour's vote remained solid in the local elections but we failed to make a big breakthrough despite the truly appalling Conservative government at national level.

The hard work of Labour party members paid off in a number of places, but not to the extent we hoped.

8. Constituents' Issues

The long list of problems caused by Brexit has been a recurring theme in correspondence from constituents. Worries about residency rights for both Brits living abroad and EU27 citizens living in Yorkshire, our future trading relationship with Europe and the damaging consequences of this Tory Brexit have all been raised with me. Unfortunately, the government's chaotic and ideologically-driven approach to the negotiations mean that almost two years since the referendum, we are in most cases no clearer on what the outcomes will be.

Fish has also been on the menu this spring, with many constituents contacting me to express their concerns over inhumane pulse fishing practices. and protecting dolphins from the dangers of bycatch.

Constituents also contacted me about:

- EU policies to reduce use of plastic
- Illegal hunting of migratory birds in Malta
- The EU's trade policy in promoting human rights and democratic norms in third countries
- The EU's refugee policy and funding of facilities for refugees in Turkey, Greece and elsewhere.

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

I have written a series of [Brexit Briefings](#) that clarify some of the legal implications and explain in detail the impact on different sectors.

My [blog](#) continues to address current issues on Brexit and in the constituency.

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

Yorkshire & Humber:

Yorkshire & Humber Labour Regional Conference *
TUC Yorkshire conference *
TUC AGM Harrogate *
Grimsby fisheries and seafood panel*
Lunch Reception with Friends of Kashmir*
Law students lecture at the University of Hull*
Leeds for Europe March*
International Women's Day Fundraising dinner

CLPs:

ShIPLEY*
York Central*
Local election campaigning across the region

London:

Fabians Conference
Tripartite meeting Lords/MPs/EP*
Ad-hoc Council Regents's University*
'Should I stay or should I go?' conference*
European Movement
All Party Parliamentary Group on EU
City of London Corporation
Frances O'Grady, TUC

European Parliament:

Kashmir Intergroup
Brussels Labour AGM*
FEPS young academics network
AFCO hearing on citizens conventions
Michel Barnier, EU Brexit negotiator
Tim Barrow, UK Ambassador to EU
Guy Verhofstadt
UK Ports
Vice-president, National Farmer's Union
Falkland Islands Fishing Industry
European Economic Forum
Norwegian Parliament delegation

Missions

Mauritania to discuss fishing issues
Bangladesh to discuss Rohingya crisis

Labour Meetings:

National Policy Forum
Chaired Brexit Panel at National Policy Forum
National Executive Committee (NEC)
NEC International Committee

Parliamentary Labour Party
Shadow Cabinet
Shadow Cabinet Brexit subcommittee

Media appearances include:

BBC Yorkshire Sunday Politics
ITV Calendar
BBC Radio Leeds – Hotseat Hour
LBC Radio
BBC News 24
Sky News

Articles published in media include:

The Independent
Labour List
Left Foot Forward
New European
Fabian Review

You can contact me by email:

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

www.richardcorbett.org.uk

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www.facebook.com/rcorbett/

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

www.eurolabour.org.uk

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