

Richard Corbett MEP

Labour Member of the European Parliament
for Yorkshire & Humber

Quarterly Report

Spring 2017

1. Reflections on the General election

Welcome to my report for the first half of 2017 - and what a hectic and remarkable year it has been for British and European politics!

Despite our joy at the Labour gains in this election, we need to take a sober look at where we are. Thanks to a brilliant campaign and to the hard work and enthusiasm of party members, we defied predictions and deprived the Tories of their majority in the Commons.

But our performance was to a degree only good in relation to the low expectations. It was not a victory. Labour has failed to secure a majority of seats for the 11th time out of 17 elections since Clem Attlee left office. We won 262 seats, compared with 318 seats for the Tories, despite them being led by one of the most incompetent Prime Ministers in British history.

We are left facing a Tory-DUP alliance. Even if it means a zombie parliament in terms of legislation, continued Tory splits, and chaos on Brexit, their MPs will vote against any motion of no confidence in the government in the foreseeable future. The Tories will no doubt replace May at some point, but the fundamental arithmetic may well not change quickly or easily.



This is a Tory party that we should have beaten hands down. The decline of third parties in England has boosted the vote for both Labour and the Conservatives, but we should have been in the position of getting the lion's share of that AND picking up a bigger swing from the Tories.* Their chaos on social care, their threats to the NHS, their divisions on Brexit, their undermining of security through cuts to police, fire and other services, their extremist ministers in key positions, and many other reasons, should have paved the way to their comprehensive defeat, not enabled them to cling onto power.

[*The swing to Labour from the Tories was just 2% in 2017, compared to 10% in 1997 and 9.7% in 1945.]

2. Election Campaigning

Apart from doing local and national media, I focussed most of my campaigning activities in eight constituencies that the party had identified as key battleground seats, plus a little bit in my own constituency of Shipley. Even though Shipley was not a prospective gain, local members ran a spirited campaign and significantly reduced Philip Davies majority.

I am delighted to welcome six new Labour MPs to the region: Jared O'Mara in Sheffield Hallam, John Grogan in Keighley, Thelma Walker

in Colne Valley, Alex Sobel in Leeds North West (the four gains) as well as Stephanie Peacock in Barnsley East and Emma Hardy in Hull West (replacing Michael Dugher and Alan Johnson respectively). I would also like to congratulate those Yorkshire & Humber MPs who successfully defended marginal seats, by campaigning very hard to increase their majorities across the board. When you see that we lost three seats touching the borders of our region, Middlesbrough South, Derbyshire NE and Mansfield, that was no mean feat.

3. Social Media

The election highlighted the growing importance of social media in election campaigning. This isn't always positive - social media is particularly vulnerable to fake news - but it is an area we cannot leave to others. Indeed, we did quite well in parts of it.

I am very active online. 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 over 30,000 followers) and on Facebook facebook.com/rcorbett/.

I was also the first UK politician to develop an App, DoorstepEU, which can be downloaded to iPhones and Android devices (see below) which I have run for over two years to provide factual information and regular rebuttal of incorrect news items on Europe and Brexit.

Doorstep EU App

My team run an app which provides 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



4. EPLP Leadership

Glenis Willmott, who has been an outstanding leader of the EPLP (and, for the last year, Chair of the Labour Party NEC) has announced, sadly, that she is standing down October.

As Deputy Leader, it is possible that I shall be Acting Leader for a short period, but I shall in any case be a candidate to succeed her.

The 20 Labour MEPs elect their leader and I am hopeful that I have sufficient support to be elected.

If I am elected I will work hard to bring the knowledge and expertise of our MEPs to bear in the Brexit discussions in Britain as well as



to represent Labour Party views towards the European institutions and beyond, including towards our sister socialist parties, with whom we shall be working closely.

5. Unite for Europe Rally



With over 10,000 others, I took part in the Unite for Europe march and rally in London on March 25th. Alongside a contingent from the Labour Movement for Europe, I addressed the crowd at Parliament Square. A video of my speech can be seen here:

<http://www.richardcorbett.org.uk/speaking-unite-europe-rally/>

6. Brexit

Brexit unavoidably dominates my political work, from constituents' letters to parliamentary debates and media interviews.

It is clear from the general election results that voters have rejected the damaging 'hard' Brexit that Theresa May offered. In the words of Professor A C Grayling 'When May called the election she said it was for a mandate for #Brexit: meaning she didn't have one. She certainly hasn't got one now!'

For the foreseeable future, uncertainty reigns. There is no majority in Parliament for a 'hard' Brexit - but what is there a majority for? And what can feasibly be secured in the negotiations? And will we conclude that Brexit itself should be questioned? Below is a summary of some of the key issues.

Trade Agreements

One option is to stay in the single market, possibly going for the 'Norwegian model' of the European Economic Area (and rejoining EFTA – the European Free Trade Association – if it will have us). This avoids the economic disruption of being torn out of

our main market, and allows most goods to flow freely without red tape.

But it implies accepting free movement. That has, up to now, been anathema to leading ministers, on the grounds that that was what voters most dislike about the EU. However, there is a growing awareness that EU freedom of movement is not an unconditional right and that we could address the difficulties it creates by enforcing the conditions properly and taking other national measures.

Single Market Rules

There is also a concern that staying in the single market means following its rules (on consumer protection, fair competition, environmental standards and workers' rights) without having a say on them anymore. But most of these rules will be followed anyway, not just by industries and services who export to the EU, but also by Britain as such in its internal legislation. Leaving the single market would simply add economic losses to the loss of political influence that arises from leaving the EU.

Customs Union

Even if we secure tariff free access, exporting into a customs union from outside means customs controls to apply World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules of origin. This means a lot of paperwork and red tape for companies and increased controls at the border. The cost of the additional bureaucracy and delays – often within international supply chains – is prohibitive, and could lose thousands of manufacturing jobs. It would also mean a customs border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. However, staying in the customs union means we continue to do trade deals with third countries jointly with the EU, not separately as Britain - though we tend to get better deals that way anyway, as Europe as a whole has more negotiating clout than individual countries do.

Security

The recent terrorist attacks in Manchester and London were a reminder that we need to cooperate more, not less, with other countries in facing this common threat. Walking out of EUROPOL and of the EU data sharing mechanisms is not a good idea. The EU might let us remain

in them, provided we accept that any disputes about the rules are settled by the European Court of Justice.

Agencies

The European Air Safety Agency, the Medicines Agency, the Chemicals Agency and so on are not just about cutting costs by pooling our verification, testing and certification systems – their authorisations are necessary for placing products on the European market. Either we ask to stay in them, or we will have to set up our own agencies at great expense, recruit the necessary expertise and negotiate recognition of them by the EU and by countries across the world. Without securing one of these two options, British airlines, pharmaceutical and chemical companies will be unable to sell to the rest of Europe.

Agriculture & Fisheries

There are increasing signs of disquiet from farmers who face leaving an agreed system of subsidies across Europe that not only guarantees their income but also their access to European markets with a level playing field. That access will be under threat if we leave. We could negotiate

to avoid such a catastrophe by following a system equivalent to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) In which case, shouldn't we stay in it and have a say on the rules? And for fisheries, scarcely a peep from the government about its intentions - just a red herring about leaving the 1964 London fisheries convention which pre-dates our EU membership!

World Trade Organisation

Falling back on WTO rules wouldn't do us any favours. Not only would it mean immediate tariffs on our exports to the EU, by far our largest export market, but it would also be a major setback for our trade with the rest of the world. We currently secure the terms on which we trade with the rest of the world via the EU, often getting better deals thanks to its clout as the world's largest market. There is no empty seat for the UK waiting at the WTO table. If we want to take a separate place as a single nation within the WTO we will need the agreement on terms of not just 27 EU member states, but 132 separate nations or trading blocs.

Citizens' Rights

Over a year after the referendum result, the government has

finally laid out its proposals about what rights EU citizens already living in the UK could keep after Brexit. It has received a very poor reception. Despite Theresa May's promise that it would be 'fair and generous' it falls far short of the offer made by the EU27 for Brits living in the rest of the EU. And even if the government eventually gets serious and finds an equitable and workable solution that is agreed by both sides, will they be willing to guarantee that settlement irrespective of what happens in the rest of negotiations? Under the principle that 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed', then any solution found on citizens rights will be hostage to the talks on other issues right up until 2019. Citizens affected will still face uncertainty and an inability to plan their lives – unless there is a pledge to implement the agreement on citizens rights irrespective of what happens on other issues.

There is also an issue of which courts should adjudicate in the event of a dispute: Brits in other EU countries can turn to the ECJ to ensure the agreement is respected, but Theresa May does not want the same right for EU citizens here.

Protections

EU legislation provides protection for consumers, workers and the environment. The government has said it will place these in British law through the so-called 'Repeal Bill' - which should be called the 'Cut and Paste Bill'!

However, it intends to give itself the right to change or repeal such legislation by statutory instrument, without passing through Parliament. This would enable it to repeal, for instance, workers' rights. This is one of the key aims of the Tory neo-liberal right.

'No deal is better than a bad deal'

No matter how many Tories contemplate it, walking away is walking over a cliff edge. We have heard a lot less of this since the election, and David Davis has now accepted the EU27 position on how to structure the negotiations,

but an agreement is essential if we are to leave without disruption, legal limbo for thousands of citizens and businesses, loss of rights and huge on-going arguments about liabilities. It is difficult to know what May would consider a 'good' deal, because she and her team have been vague about what they are seeking, other than repeating David Davis's claim that we will secure 'the exact same benefits as we currently have as members of the Single Market and Customs Union'. Securing tariff free and red-tape free access to the EU market is normally the reason for joining it, not for leaving it!

Compared with the clear negotiating guidelines laid out by the EU, the government's strategy seems to owe much to Lewis Carroll; the White Queen urged Alice to try to believe in something ridiculous, claiming 'Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.'

On these and other issues, I have written a series of **Brexit Briefings** which you can access at:

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

7. Grimethorpe Colliery Band



The talented musicians of the Grimethorpe Colliery Band

I am thrilled to become Grimethorpe Colliery Band's Honorary President in its centenary year.

The band has experienced severe challenges in its 100-year history, not least when Grimethorpe's colliery closed in 1992. This could have signalled the end, but with determination it survived and adapted. Its story was immortalised in the 1996 film *Brassed Off!* in which the band played on screen alongside the actors throughout the production. After the film's box office success, the band was invited to perform at the 50th BAFTA Awards ceremony to a star-studded audience at the Royal Albert Hall in 1997.

The band has always been a trailblazer: it was one of the two bands to first perform at the BBC Promenade concerts in the Royal Albert Hall (1974) and the very

first band to play in the European Parliament Building in Strasbourg (1997). Over the decades it has been no stranger to television and film audiences, appearing at some of Britain's most prestigious national and international events. The band has been centre stage at of such events as the Eurovision Song Contest and the FA Cup final at Wembley and has toured the world from Japan to Australia, from Africa to Hong Kong and New Zealand as well as to many European countries closer to home.

In spite of all its success, however, the band remains firmly rooted in the village of Grimethorpe in South Yorkshire where its band room is located.

The band today, beyond its own artistic goals and excellence, is committed to mentoring and training

young brass and percussion players so as to create opportunities for future generations – hence it has created a Grimethorpe Youth Band Summer Course.

Beyond this, the band is also involved in a number of local initiatives to enhance musical training for school-age children. I have already started

working with them to secure their sound financial future and ensure that they continue to be able to entertain and delight audiences all over Yorkshire, the UK and the world.

I invite you to join us at one of our musical events and share in their unique and inspiring story.

8. Correspondence from Constituents

As the government's shambolic handling of the Brexit process continues, I have received a steadily increasing number of letters and emails from constituents who are concerned about the impact Brexit will have on the UK, particularly in relation to citizens' rights, attitudes towards immigrants, jobs, investment, trade, higher education and the potential break-up of the Union. I have also received many emails from UK citizens living in other EU countries who wish to return to the UK and are concerned about issues such as pension rights and health insurance.

In terms of EU votes and legislation, CETA has again been one of the main concerns for constituents. Despite some misgivings, the Socialist and Democrat Group in the European Parliament, of which Labour MEPs are members, voted to enable

provisional application of the agreement, which does not include the controversial investment court. For a full summary of our position on CETA and what happens next, please see my blog:

<http://www.richardcorbett.org.uk/ceta/>

Other issues raised with me included changes to the regulation of greenhouse gases for industry in the EU Emissions Trading System; the authorisation of glyphosate on the EU market; the strengthening of laws regulating firearms; the 'link tax' proposal for copyright in the Digital Single Market Directive; minimum standards for the protection of farm rabbits; the target to halve food waste in Europe by 2030; the 'Dieselgate' car emissions scandal; LGBT rights in Chechnya; and, finally, the IHRA definition on anti-semitism.

9. Upcoming events

EUROPEAN POLICY FORUM

‘Brexit and Yorkshire: the impacts and challenges for the region.’

Date: Saturday 21st October 2017

Venue: The Octagon, Walker St, Hull, HU3 2RA

How will the region of Yorkshire & Humber be affected by Brexit, assuming it happens?

What will the various potential deals (or indeed ‘no deal’) on offer for Brexit look like?

What is the likely impact on different sectors of the economy?

And how can we prepare to respond?

This year’s policy forum will consider the potential impacts and challenges of Brexit on the citizens, businesses and economy of Yorkshire & Humber in the context of the national debate on the UK-EU negotiations.

You are invited to join us and contribute to the debate on the defining political event of our time.

Email EPF17@richardcorbett.org.uk to reserve your place.

ANNUAL STRASBOURG TRIP

Would you like to visit the beautiful city of Strasbourg and see how the European Parliament works?

Elizabeth Nash organises an annual trip and this year it is 22nd-28th October.

For further information contact her

by phone 0113 275 8594 or by email: elizabeth.nash@leeds.gov.uk



Campaigning with Holly Lynch and Labour members in Halifax during the election

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

In Yorkshire & Humber

Tadcaster Brewery
L&G Modular Homes
(Sherburn In Elmet)
ABP (Hull)
Siemens (Hull)
Grimethorpe Band
Various food processing firms (Grimsby)
Notre Dame School (Leeds)
Wetherby U3A
Meeting with Bradford Council
Leader and Brexit team
Leeds for Europe
Fundraising dinner with Keir Starmer
(Wakefield CLP)
Rachel Reeves Book Launch (Saltaire)
Regional Board
York Fabian Society
Leeds Bradford Airport
BASF Bradford
Digital Exchange Bradford
University of Leeds

CLP visits

Beverley & Holderness*
York*
Shipley*
Skipton & Ripon*
Leeds NW*
Bradford East*
Keighley*

NB: There was a moratorium on visits to CLPs during the election period

UK events outside Y & H

March for Europe (Newcastle)*
Unite4Europe (London)*
PES/LME Brexit Conference (London)*
Policy Connect (London)*
Global Justice (London)*
Brassed Off! Live at Royal Albert Hall
March for Europe (London)*
Britain for Europe (Manchester)
European Movement (telephone conference)

In European Parliament

(other than Parliamentary meetings)

Erasmus 30 years celebration
French civil servants visit*
Visitors' group to parliament by
Sheffield City College students*
Exeter and LSE students*
White Rose Universities reception*
New Zealand MPs
Grayling Brexit event*

SPD Hamburg group*
Unite delegation
'Brexit and Citizens' Rights' event hosted by
European Citizens' Action Service*
Prof. Loukas Tsoukalis book presentation*
Rolls Royce trades unionists
Welsh Assembly visit*
Bellevue Programme*
Europe Direct*

Media appearances (selection)

BBC Sunday Politics - Yorks & Lincs
BBC Radio Humberside -
Brexit & Common Fisheries Policy
Yorkshire Post Interview -
Article 50: What's next?
BCB radio
BBC Radio Leeds - Hotseat Hour

LBC radio
RT
Fox News
Sky News
French, Belgian, German Dutch TV and Radio

Several articles in numerous publications

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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