

EUROPEAN MOVEMENT
TAMAR BRANCH NEWSLETTER
Spring Issue 2010

Comment:

General Election: Well who would have thought it? Shock-horror, we now have the first peace-time coalition since the 1930s! Even more surprising is that it's between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats – a party traditionally left of centre and therefore generally assumed to be more the natural ally of Labour. But the unexpected lure of power (albeit as junior partner) for a five year fixed term, the promise of electoral reform leading to some form of proportional representation, and the harsh arithmetic seems to have made Nick Clegg's decision inevitable.

Our European partners probably can't understand what all the fuss is about and why we are so attached to our single party, first-past-the-post system. A coalition might look revolutionary in London, but elsewhere in Europe it has a homely feel about it! Most European democracies depend on cross-party alliances to govern. Germany, the strongest economy in Europe, has only had one short period of single party government since the Federal Republic was established in 1949 (and the previous single party administration which ran the country for 12 years was not a great success as the world found to its cost!). Greece, as we are now also learning, has descended into fiscal chaos under one-party administrations, and let's not forget that Britain won the second world war under a coalition government.

It is difficult to argue against some system of proportional representation which is firmly established throughout the EU, apart from the danger of allowing minority parties into parliament. PR is certainly the more democratic option, but the prospect of BNP or UKIP members of parliament (boo!) is not particularly appealing.....

But where does the new British coalition stand on the EU? Remember David Cameron won the party leadership in 2005 by promising his europhobes he would quit the European Peoples Party (EPP) – home to the Christian democrats and conservatives ruling Germany, France, Italy and Poland - and he stuck by his promise by ordering his MEPs to form a new eurosceptic alliance with east European nationalists deeply suspicious of a federalist conspiracy, or, as Nick Clegg recently called them “nutters, anti-Semites and homophobes”. The new Prime Minister is also committed to repealing the Human Rights Act of 1998 (which gives Britain the fundamental rights and freedoms contained in the European Convention on Human Rights) and replacing it with a British Bill of Rights. As adherence to the ECHR is now effectively a condition of membership of the EU and the Lib.Dems. (especially Nick Clegg) have vowed to defend the Human Rights Act, Cameron looks like having severe problems if he goes ahead. The Conservatives want less of Europe and have pledged no further transfer of power or sovereignty to Europe without a referendum and no adoption of the single currency during the next five years. The appointment as Foreign Secretary of the fiercely eurosceptic William Hague, who is regarded with suspicion across the EU after he ran a strongly nationalistic campaign as tory leader in 2001, is further evidence that Europe is way down their list of priorities. This was underlined by Hague's first overseas visit – predictably not to Brussels but to the USA, no doubt anxious to perpetuate the myth of the 'special relationship' so dear to our politicians. Problems within the coalition could well arise given the very pro-European position of Nick Clegg's party. The Lib.Dems sit in the European Parliament with the Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe (ALDE) and are in favour of ever closer ties with Europe. There is a slight glimmer of hope with the appointment of David Lidington as Europe Minister. Lidington, a moderate, served as special adviser to the pro-European former Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd from 1989-90. He will presumably play the 'good cop' to Hague's 'bad cop' on European matters. Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel were reportedly delighted when Clegg, a former EU official and MEP was appointed deputy prime minister and will no doubt be further encouraged by the appointment of Lidington. But they shouldn't expect a repeat of what happened to St Paul on his way to Damascus when William Hague sets out on the road to Brussels.....

Eurozone crisis: The turmoil in the financial markets continues despite the massive bailout of Greece and defence of Spain and Portugal through a €750bn loan package from the ECB. It is becoming clear that the rescue package has only bought more time and cannot resolve the underlying debt problems of southern eurozone members. The ECB's chief economist maintains that the turmoil will only calm down if the 16 eurozone member states reform their economies, increase competitiveness, and reduce their deficits. All very well for the big exporting members like Germany and France but difficult for the likes of Greece and

Portugal. There is also the argument of those who opposed the euro from the outset that without fiscal and economic union the single currency is doomed to fail. There is a growing feeling that profligate members should face the scrutiny of their budgets by their peers and/or the real possibility of ejection from the eurozone. Although our position outside the eurozone would appear safe, given that we still have control of our interest rates and can devalue our currency if necessary, the Europhobes have no cause to rejoice. The EU is still the world's largest economy. Our EU partners account for 60% of our exports so we need a strong eurozone. The UK deficit is actually higher than that of Greece and the fall in the euro has not benefited the pound which has also fallen against the dollar. As the crisis goes global stock markets in London and New York as well as Frankfurt and Paris have seen huge falls. Anger is being turned on the banking and financial speculators, but as London is home to 80% of hedge funds, George Osborne is reluctant to take the action currently being brought in, particularly by Germany which has recently banned short selling, to curb the excesses of these funds. Clearly the financial speculators must take their share of the blame, but the disparity in economic strength amongst eurozone members puts remorseless pressure on the single currency and an unfair burden on the likes of Germany and France. The EU needs strong leadership at this difficult time and it is therefore all the more disappointing not to have heard a little more from Herman von Rompuy and Lady Ashton.

UKIP's Performance : Following Nigel Farage's lucky escape from the plane crash on polling day, I felt that Jack Dee's comment on The News Quiz ("the Ukip campaign didn't really take off, did it?") was a little unkind! It really was not a happy day for Nigel, coming, as he did, a poor third in his foolhardy attempt to defeat no less a figure than the Speaker of the House to win UKIP's first seat in Westminster. His troops failed just as badly. Overall UKIP fielded 560 candidates, failed to win a single seat and polled 3% of the national vote. It is not clear whether there is any truth in the rumour that Herman von Rompuy sent him a get-well-card saying he understood how, what with his sore ribs and election results and everything, he must be feeling like a damp rag at the moment. Allegedly Mr van Rompuy went on to suggest a short period of convalescence in Belgium, which, as Nigel had described it in his rant in the European Parliament as a 'non country', would be the perfect choice for a convalescing 'non MP'. He kindly enclosed a leaflet for the clinic in question and, as it was in Brussels, also enclosed a street map so Nigel could find his way in a city he had seldom visited in the past and was unlikely to see much of in the future.

On a more serious note it is surprising that UKIP and the BNP can seriously believe that any success they may have in European elections can translate into gains in national elections. These fringe parties are unable or unwilling to see that the election of their MEPs is simply the consequence of a deeply eurosceptic nation wanting to wave two fingers at the EU. General elections on the other hand, are fought on many issues of which Europe is only one, and there is a higher turn-out which doesn't favour the extremes. Most importantly it must be remembered that none of the major parties capable of forming an administration advocate Britain's withdrawal.

Nearer home.....

Tamar Branch meeting - What hope for the Middle East?

Can the differences between Palestinians and Israelis ever be resolved? Members of the European Movement Tamar Branch discussed this question at a meeting in Sydenham Damerel Methodist Hall on the 22nd of March.

The guest speaker was Sir Andrew Burns, a former British Ambassador to Israel. He described the problems from both sides. For the Israelis, he said, security is of paramount importance. Israel is unwilling to compromise on the status of Jerusalem, which it insists must belong to Israel. And Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, which are illegal in the eyes of the rest of the world, are entrenched.

The Palestinians, meanwhile, insist on the right of refugees and their descendants, who fled when the state of Israel was created, to return to their homelands, a demand to which Israel cannot

concede. And they are equally insistent that Jerusalem, with its holy Islamic sites, should not be exclusively possessed by Israel.

Both sides, Sir Andrew stressed, encompass a wide variety of opinions, both moderate and extreme. In the face of their apparently irreconcilable demands, and Israel's present hard-line Government, he held out little hope of an early solution.

In the discussion that followed, members noted that the longrunning dispute provoked instability and extremism in the region, encouraged the build-up of arms, including nuclear weapons, and poisoned the relations of other states, including EU members, with the countries of the region. Neither side was willing to make the necessary compromises.

After his posting to Israel, Sir Andrew Burns became British High Commissioner in Canada. He is a former Governor of the BBC, and is the Chairman of the Anglo-Israel Society. The meeting was chaired by Sir Cyril Townsend.

After the meeting the audience was invited to an excellent buffet supper at the Denne's home where they had the opportunity to meet Sir Andrew and other guests.

[Photo shows Sir Andrew Burns (centre) with Sir Cyril Townsend (right) and Christopher Denne, Branch chairman (left)]



Membership: We would like to increase our branch membership and urge members to encourage like-minded friends of any or no political persuasion to join us. Our new membership secretary is Elspeth Wiltshire who will be pleased to hear from anyone interested or requiring further information. She can be contacted either by e-mail: ewiltshire@btinternet.com or by phone: 01752848453

We would also like to take this opportunity to express our thanks to members David Naish, Stan Chappel and John Phillips for their generous cash donations to branch funds.

Local schools and Europe:

This is the fifth year that a group of Sixth Form students from the South West have competed for a place on a visit to the Euroscola Day at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Back in December 35 students from 9 schools (Callington CC, Hele's, DHSG, DHSB, Plymstock, Coombe Dean, PHSG, Ivybridge CC and Torquay Boys Grammar) competed for 25 places by presenting their views on a European issue, in French, and answering questions from a judging panel. The visit to Strasbourg took place on 11th – 14th March, with Euroscola Day on Friday, 12th March when the students took the place of MEPs in the 'hémicycle'. They discussed a number of European issues both in groups with their peers from the other European member states, and in a plenary session, and also asked questions of a panel of experts including an MEP and Parliament officials. This year was even more successful than previous ones since, according to the party leader, Mrs. Wolstencroft, two out of the six group presidents leading discussion groups were British students. One reporter, and almost all the students took the opportunity to ask questions in the plenary – not an easy task in front of 500 young people. The following day the whole group descended on the square in front of the cathedral in Strasbourg and did a survey of people's views on Europe – all in French! The following is a selection of their feedback on the Euroscola experience.

Jon Allsop (DHSB): *I suppose I've always been quite pro-Europe and so in that respect the day didn't exactly revolutionise my views, it rather affirmed what I already believed. I am a firm believer that most British euroscepticism is based on xenophobia, media scaremongering and general ignorance and completely reject the view that the EU is undemocratic. I accept that the EU needs to have certain key competences (purely for the reason that intergovernmentalism doesn't completely work in anything other than an ideal world), although do think that we should be wary of federalism. Euroscola day really helped me to justify this viewpoint, as I was able to see for myself that the cultural differences dividing each different European people were tangible enough to render a single European government an impracticality. This was reflected in the findings of my Commission, the majority of whom voted to keep Europe as it is at the moment. Euroscola day helped me to realise that European problems can be solved both diplomatically, democratically and independently of certain binding agreements, although it seems to me to be clearer than ever that a federal European 'super-state' would create more problems than it would solve. Europe should now work towards combatting negative perceptions of its work, in order to turn itself into a more coherent and credible authority on the world stage.*

Fran Daykin (DHSG): *Euroscola was a really amazing experience; people were so willing to take part in the day's events that making friends was easier than expected- I was even lucky enough to get invited to Belgium. I now have a further understanding of the political setup in the European Parliament and as a result feel like an EU citizen which wasn't the case before. I think knowing what goes on in the European Parliament and how it effects you really makes a difference. During the 'sondage' it was clear from the answers the participants gave with regard to Britain that our country as a member of the EU is viewed to be selfish. This has made me feel like I need to make others aware of what goes on in the European Parliament; however getting your friends to listen to you talking about politics proves no easy feat!*

Laura Cheney (Coombe Dean): *I think that my experience didn't make me feel any more European, as I have always thought of myself as European, but I do think that I am more aware of how unwilling England/Britain as a whole is to participate in Europe, which I think is a shame as it has so much to offer everyone.*

Rhys Hancock (from Heles School and one of the group presidents):

It was an amazing day and I have had the chance to experience what it is like to be an MEP. However my trip wasn't all about politics, it was also a chance to meet other people and use my linguistic skills. I even managed to come away with a number of contact details of

students from Portugal to Romania and even Estonia and I often speak to them online and am even looking into having one person over to stay to practice their English as we get on so well. Our language skills were most certainly tested at times, most of all during the survey which we had to conduct in pairs in the middle of Strasbourg. I most definitely feel more European now in comparison to before I went on the trip. I also realised how all the stereotypes which we are brought up to believe are really not true and it was funny to learn of some of the stereotypes Europeans have of the British! As for my views on Europe, I now believe it is a great opportunity to build relationships and is the future and therefore something which needs lots of support and development especially from the public. All in all it was an experience which I will never forget and something which has made me so grateful to those who made it possible.



Euroscola Group from the South West setting out for the European Parliament on Friday, 12th March

Future Programme:

Fairs: Dates for the first two of our annual fairs are:

Launceston 15th July

Okehampton 12th August

Members are cordially invited to join our teams on the stand to provide support, help with distribution of leaflets and other material and interact with the general public.

If you are willing to help please contact our team co-ordinator, Graham Facks-Martin on 01566 775866 or e-mail: facksmartin@btinternet.com

Tuesday 8 June Meeting with Mark Yeoman, Deputy Director, Convergence Partnership for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. What has the EU done for Cornwall? Mark Yeoman will talk about the experience of dealing with the Commission, the difficulties of raising partnership finance, and the projects that have received support. 7.15 pm, Cornwall College, St Austell

Please park on or near Visitor Parking (14) and come in through the Main Entrance which is already at level 4. The meeting room (J529) is up one floor on Level 5

Saturday 3 July Tamar Branch summer party. The social highlight of the season! Good company, food, wine, music, boules, raffle, sunshine (the last not guaranteed, but the weather has been kind to us in recent years). Churchtown Farm, Sydenham Damerel (near Tavistock), from 6.00 pm onwards.

Do come if you can. Bring friends. Apologies to those for whom distances are great. Our branch is stretched over rather a large area!



George has still not got over his bitter disappointment at the election result. He and his colleagues on the Trago Mills UKIP Committee had spent many hours working on a five point manifesto (available at all branches both in large and extra-large print) which they were sure would propel UKIP candidates into Westminster.

1. Immediate withdrawal from the EU
2. Increase cell occupancy in all UK prisons
3. Immediate withdrawal from the EU
4. Provide smoking rooms in pubs
5. Immediate withdrawal from the EU

Following the air crash George and his colleagues had issued a statement denying the rumour that it was a giant size Union Jack that Nigel had wrapped round himself and not the 'Vote UKIP' banner that had caught on the tailplane. He was particularly upset at the news of Nigel's failure to oust the Speaker of the House of Commons. George had told everyone that having a UKIP Speaker, particularly Nigel Farage who is so good at shouting , was just what Westminster needed. On the plus side there had been great rejoicing throughout Ukip branches at the news of Nigel's courageous savaging in the European Parliament of the new president of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy. The 'damp rag' and 'bank clerk' epithets and description of Belgium as a 'non country' had gone down particularly well with Ukip members. At George's suggestion and to loud approval by the branch, the video clip of Nigel's memorable tirade was put on continuous loop in all Trago branches. Understandably there had been much anger at the imposition by the EP of the £2,700 fine on brave Mr F., who, after all, had thoughtfully prefaced his remarks by *I don't want to be rude, but.....* George and his colleagues had immediately set up collection points for well-wishers to make donations towards the fine and although only 38p and a collection of unidentified foreign coins had been collected to date, they were confident that Ukip members would not let their former leader down.

There was also fury within the committee's ranks that the Tories had entered into coalition with a party in favour of closer ties with the EU and whose leader was an example of the very opposite of the Little Englander (their preferred model) – a polyglot former eurocrat and MEP who cut his

political teeth in Brussels, married a Spaniard and boasted continental ancestry! That such a man should now be Britain's deputy prime minister, is, according to an apoplectic George, nothing short of high treason.

My thanks to all who have contributed to this edition. Letters and other contributions to the Newsletter are always welcome and should be e-mailed to the Editor, Malcolm Bower at the following address: mlbower@tiscali.co.uk or by post to: Laburnum Cottage, Commercial Street, Gunnislake, Cornwall. PL18 9JP

M.Bower
May 2010