

100 Labour achievements in Europe

by Richard Corbett MEP

Labour MEPs have secured new Europe-wide rules which...

...in the workplace

- 1) signed Britain up to the Social Chapter, giving British workers the rights already enjoyed by their continental colleagues.
- 2) implemented EU wide laws on working time, limiting the length of time workers can be obliged by their employer to work to 48 hours per week.
- 3) required, for the first time in Britain, a guaranteed right to paid holiday.
- 4) brought in the European works council laws giving new rights to workers in transnational companies.
- 5) introduced proper procedures for information & consultation of workers on all significant changes affecting companies with over 50 employees.
- 6) reversed the burden of proof in discrimination cases, putting the onus on employers to prove that they do not discriminate.
- 7) give both parents the right to time off when a child is born or adopted.
- 8) brought in measures to give part time workers the same rights as full time workers as regards training, pensions, maternity rights and leave.
- 9) improved the rights of temporary workers regarding pay and paid leave.
- 10) adopted common standards on numerous aspects of health & safety at work, including extra protection for workers using machinery which vibrates.

...on consumer protection

- 11) brought in fines for airlines for deliberate overbooking as well as doubled cash compensation for stranded air passengers with the right to meals, refreshments and hotel accommodation if necessary while passengers wait.
- 12) brought in a system for the compulsory labelling of food containing GMOs.

13) banned children under 3 from travelling in cars without a baby or child seat. Required older children to use special seats or booster cushions and passengers in coaches to wear seat belts.

14) reduced car prices in the UK. The "block exemption", which allowed car manufacturers to sell new cars exclusively through agreed dealerships expired in 2002. Since October 2003, new rules increase competition and flexibility, allowing dealers to sell more than one brand at the same site. The result: cheaper prices for all.

15) obliged all new urban buses operating in the EU to be fitted with a ramp or lift in addition to a kneeling system, which will make buses across Europe fully accessible for all disabled people.

16) required all tobacco products in Europe to carry illustrated health warnings.

17) created a European Food Safety Agency and promoted greater food safety measures in general.

18) banned the use of dangerous chemicals in children's toys.

19) have given shoppers a two year guarantee on new electronic products. If goods develop faults within 6 months of purchase, shopkeepers must prove they were in good condition when sold. Consumers can expect faulty goods to be repaired, replaced or refunded.

20) set up a dynamic European market in mobile telephony putting Europe far ahead of America in mobile phone usage, including text messaging and other uses.

21) forced car manufacturers to re-design the front of cars to reduce the likelihood of death or serious injury to pedestrians.

22) approved new rules for the labelling of table eggs so that consumers can identify them as free range, barn or cage.

23) cracked down on "timeshare-touts" misleading holiday-makers over property-share schemes.

24) prevented pharmaceutical companies from promoting their brands directly to patients over the heads of doctors.

25) provided for a 7 day "cooling off" period for people to change their minds about any purchase made by phone or mail order throughout the EU.

26) opened up the telecommunications market, leading to cheaper internet access and telephone calls.

...on the environment

27) increased the amount of packaging waste that must be recycled. EU member states will be obliged to recycle 55% of glass, paper, cardboard, metals and plastics by 31 December 2008.

28) laid down that all electrical goods sold in the EU after 2005 will have to be recycled at the manufacturer's expense in the biggest recycling programme Europe has ever seen.

29) approved measures to implement the Kyoto protocol to reduce greenhouse gases.

30) banned single hull tankers carrying heavy fuel oil from European ports.

- 31)** required that black box data recorders be compulsory on all ships.
- 32)** improved air quality by adopting higher standards on the quality of petrol & diesel fuels and promoted biofuels as an alternative, thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- 33)** approved new EU-wide measures to improve energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy, such as the Energy Star scheme and the Intelligent Energy for Europe programme.
- 34)** made car manufacturers responsible, from 2007 onwards, for taking back old vehicles and recycling all materials from them.
- 35)** adopted measures to protect migrating birds all the way along their routes across Europe.
- 36)** set up a European-wide scheme protecting vulnerable habitats with rare species of animals and plants.
- 37)** enabled shoppers to choose green products by introducing the "eco label" awarded to products that meet strict criteria minimising the damage done to the environment.
- 38)** brought in the "blue flag" quality standards for bathing water raising standards at Europe's beaches enabling tourists to avoid unpleasant surprises at their holiday beaches.

...on health

- 39)** enabled all EU citizens to have a health card from 2005. This card will replace the E111 scheme and will continue to ensure emergency hospital treatment for UK residents and their families while on holiday. It will provide cover without having to reapply each time you travel.
- 40)** banned tobacco advertising across Europe as of 2005.
- 41)** ended the moratorium on EU funding for human embryonic stem cell research, thereby improving the chances of new remedies being found for debilitating diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.
- 42)** banned the marketing and use of Asbestos across Europe.
- 43)** brought in better labelling of food products so that those who must avoid particular ingredients can have clear information.
- 44)** set strict limits on the use of chromium in building materials, reducing eczema, dermatitis and "cement burns" among construction workers and DIY enthusiasts.
- 45)** require disclosure, clear labelling and safety analysis of food supplements to prevent harmful or ineffective supplements reaching the shelves.

... on animal welfare

- 46)** banned the testing of cosmetics on animals and the marketing in Europe of any new cosmetics tested on animals outside the EU.

47) introduced “passports for pets”. From 2004 quarantine-free travel will be introduced for guinea pigs, rabbits, chinchillas and hamsters (thus extending legislation, which came into force in 2000 for dogs and cats) provided they meet strict health and safety criteria.

48) increased the size of battery cages for hens, prior to phasing them out completely in 2012.

49) improved the welfare of pigs, introducing a ban which will end the use of individual sow stalls.

50) tightened up control of zoos and how they operate.

... on fighting crime

51) created the Eurojust – a judicial co-ordination unit, which aims to improve co-ordination of investigations where trans-frontier crime or international gangs are involved.

52) introduced a common definition of terrorism to close a legal loophole that prevented action against international terrorism.

53) made many legal decisions, including divorce and child custody, enforceable across the EU.

54) created a European Arrest Warrant making it more difficult for fugitives from justice to avoid arrest by moving between EU countries (as in the “Costa del Crime” situation in Spain).

55) approved a European Network Information Security Agency which will help fight cross-border fraud in e-commerce and telecomms.

56) approved a scheme that will introduce compensation for people who are victims of crime while travelling in other EU countries.

...on fraud, mismanagement and transparency

57) set up the committee which investigated the Santer Commission, leading to its resignation and replacement.

58) supported the reform programme of the new Commission's Vice President Neil Kinnock, aimed at modernising EU management and strengthening financial controls.

59) voted for reforms of the system of MEPs' expenses and required every Labour MEP to have his/her own spending verified every year by an external auditor, rather than rely only on the Parliament's system of spot checks.

60) provided for MEPs' declarations of interest to be placed on the internet.

...on trade and foreign policy

Labour MEPs and the government...

61) enhanced the EU's overseas development programme making the EU the largest donor of development aid in the world.

62) brought in the "Everything but Arms Initiative" whereby exports from the least developed countries are allowed duty free and quota free into the EU.

63) worked hard with the European Commission in preparations for negotiations in the World Trade Organisation, in order to promote fairer trade, particularly for developing countries.

64) provided financial assistance to help South Africa make the transition from apartheid to democracy.

65) at the St Malo summit, launched with France the proposals for EU defence and security cooperation to develop Europe as a global force for good.

66) bought in a common policy restricting the sale of arms to repressive regimes in third countries.

...on general EU policies

Labour MEPs and the government...

67) were at the forefront of negotiations to bring ten new countries into the EU on 1 May.

68) secured the "Lisbon agenda" for economic reform aiming to make Europe the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010.

69) successfully fought protectionist subterfuges keeping British products out of the market in other countries, notably as regards insurance, construction, and even...chocolate.

70) strengthened Britain's commitment to and support for the principle of joining the euro – showing that, under the right conditions, the gains to Britain are considerable.

71) shifted the balance of EU spending away from agriculture to helping economic regeneration in regions (whilst keeping the special budgetary rebate for Britain).

72) obtained further reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy to lower prices, enhance environmental protection and phase out export subsidies.

73) extended the student exchange programme (Erasmus) that allows thousands of students to spend a year studying in another European country.

74) launched the 'Daphne' EU programme to combat violence against women and children.

75) provided for recognition of children's rights, previously ignored by the EU.

76) approved a €17.5bn programme for research (Sixth Framework Programme, 2003-2006), which aims to create a strong European research area so that all European citizens can benefit from the results of better coordination in the fields of science and research.

Constitutional changes

... in the Treaty of Amsterdam

77) improved parliamentary scrutiny of all EU legislation by allowing national parliaments a six week period to examine proposals and discuss them with their minister before decisions are taken and by

giving the European Parliament the right to jointly adopt or oppose legislation through the “co-decision” procedure.

78) spelt out the principle of subsidiarity and the procedures to apply it in a protocol annexed to the Treaty.

79) provided for the suspension of any member state that ceases to be democratic or to respect human rights.

80) enabled the adoption of Europe-wide laws against discrimination on grounds of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

81) provided for greater openness and transparency, with a right of public access to EU documents (now available on the internet) and an obligation to publish the results of legislative votes in the Council.

...and in the Treaty of Nice

82) secured many institutional changes required for a larger EU: cutting the size of the Commission, reviewing the weighting of the votes in the Council to better reflect the size of states, and reforming the Court to speed up judicial review.

83) providing for the possibility of EU humanitarian and peace-keeping military action when NATO is not involved.

... and, contained in the draft new constitution, proposals...

84) replacing the complex and overlapping set of EU treaties with a single readable document spelling out clearly the powers of the EU and their limits.

85) making the adoption of all EU legislation subject to the prior scrutiny of national Parliaments and the double approval of both national governments (in the EU Council) and directly elected MEPs – a level of scrutiny that exists in no other international structure.

86) obliging EU institutions to conform to standards of fundamental rights laid down in a charter.

87) extending Majority Voting in areas of interest to Britain, but keeping the veto for tax, social security and foreign policy/defence.

88) providing for the President of the Commission to be elected by Parliament.

89) improving further the involvement of national parliaments who are given the right to object to draft legislation if they feel it goes beyond the EU's remit.

90) replacing the EU's Foreign policy High Representative and the Commissioner for External Relations with a single post coordinating all aspects of the EU's external representation.

91) giving the European Council (the three-monthly meetings of Prime Ministers) a 2 ½ year chair instead of a 6-month rotating President.

92) introducing a new budget procedure, giving European Parliament the final say on each year's spending (within a multi-annual financial programme to be agreed by EP and Council). This means that agricultural spending will no longer be ring-fenced, but will be brought under full democratic control.

Defending British interests

Labour MEPs have blocked or amended proposals which would have...

- 93)** opened up port services to unrestricted competition.
- 94)** introduced a costly system of monitoring and tagging sheep.
- 95)** introduced an American style patent for computer software programmes.
- 96)** modified our system of Hallmarking precious metals.
- 97)** put VAT on postage stamps.
- 98)** killed off the red ensign on ships of the British merchant navy.

Last but not least...

99) Labour MEPs have helped thousands of constituents with problems in other EU countries, from planespotters arrested in Greece to people who have had accidents abroad or been victims of crime while on holiday.

100) Labour MEPs have worked to report back to their constituents through regular reports, websites, meetings and newsletters, and have welcomed over 10,000 UK visitors to the European Parliament.