

## Conservative MEP Monthly Report – December 2008

### Labour MEPs rebel over Working Time

Labour MEPs played a central role in a humiliating defeat for the Government on the issue of the UK opt-out from the EU's Working Time Directive. The European Parliament voted on 17 December by 421 to 273 to end the opt-out within three years. The issue will now be subject to negotiation between the Parliament and the Council of Ministers, which continues to support the opt-out. Labour MEP Stephen Hughes, who led the European Socialist Group's opposition to the opt-out, said: "I think it is now a question of when the opt-outs end rather than if."

Labour MEPs were in open defiance of Labour policy: Business Minister Pat McFadden had said that it would be a "real mistake" to end the opt-out while Business Secretary Peter Mandelson said removing the opt-out would be "absurd."

**Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP**, Conservative Employment Spokesman in the European Parliament, said: "This is a double failure of Gordon Brown. Not only has he failed to control his MEPs, but he also naively signed up to a package deal that saw Britain give ground on the Agency Workers Directive in exchange for maintaining our Working Time opt-out. His folly was to assume the Left in the European Parliament would not sabotage the deal."

"Socialist MEPs have won a battle today, but they must not be allowed to win the war. The British government must dig in and defend the opt-out. Fifteen EU nations now take advantage of the flexibility provided by the opt-out and none of them should back down. It should never be the place of the European Parliament to tell people they cannot work, particularly during a downturn. Scrapping our Working Time opt-out is even more nonsensical in today's economic climate than ever before."

### Deal reached to cut car emissions

The EU has agreed a directive on car emissions that will encourage greener cars without driving manufacturers out of business. It will require car-

makers to reduce emissions by 18 per cent over the next six years. **Martin Callanan MEP**, one of the negotiators of the deal, said: "The deal we have struck represents the best of both worlds. We have shown that we can encourage car manufacturers to go green by including incentives for investment in clean technology, but without imposing unreasonable burdens. We have recognised that manufacturers cannot develop new cars and technologies overnight, particularly given the huge trials they face during the downturn."

The directive, which was approved by the European Parliament in December, will mean that CO2 emissions must be reduced to 130g per kilometre between 2012 and 2015, rather than by 2012 as originally proposed. A long-term target of 95g by 2020 will also be introduced. Conservatives successfully defended a special clause for niche manufacturers such as Jaguar-Land Rover. Under the agreement, these manufacturers will still have to reduce their emissions more than an average car manufacturer, but not by the swingeing levels that had been envisaged at one stage. Conservatives also helped secure an exemption for LTI, which makes the iconic London taxi cab.

MEPs also voted to approve the EU's Climate and Energy package, which had been agreed by Heads of Government at the December European Council meeting. Conservative Environment Spokesman **John Bowis MEP** commented: "We give two cheers for this package. Conservative MEPs have striven for ambitious measures to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. We are disappointed that Europe's governments, including Britain, failed to provide a lead to the world and agreed to water down the proposals, particularly on emissions trading. However, we have supported the package so that industry has greater certainty and can begin to meet the challenges we have set. We can look to the Copenhagen Climate Change conference next December with the tools in place to reduce the greenhouse gases that threaten us. It is time to act on our commitment to cut emissions by at least 20% by 2020. It is a start. At Copenhagen we must set higher targets for the future."

Conservatives were able to secure amendments that exclude small businesses and hospitals from the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), and ensured funding for demonstration projects on carbon capture and storage technologies. However, a Conservative proposal for an Emission Performance Standard for new power stations was defeated. This amendment would have ensured all new coal-fired power stations could only be approved if they were to capture the CO2 they emit.

### **Irish voters should not be deceived**

At the EU Summit on 11-12 December, it was announced that Ireland would hold a second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, sometime in 2009. Responding to news, Conservative Leader in the European Parliament, [Timothy Kirkhope MEP](#), said: “There are no real substantive changes on offer between the treaty the Irish rejected before and what they will be offered next year. And there have only been a few cosmetic changes from the European Constitution, which the French and Dutch people decisively rejected. Irish, French and Dutch voters must not be deceived by this constant tinkering around the edges of the European Constitution. At what point will Europe's leaders realise the meaning of the word 'no'?”

Mr Kirkhope renewed calls for the Government to honour its promise to hold a referendum on the Treaty in the UK. He said: “Forcing the Irish people to vote again is undemocratic, but at least they have had an opportunity to voice their concerns. The British people have been totally voiceless over this treaty, and the concessions made to the Irish make the case for a referendum in the UK all the more compelling.”

### **Conservatives welcome Small Business Act**

In December, the EU agreed on a package of measures known as the Small Business Act (SBA). The SBA is a policy framework covering a range of legislative proposals and non-legislative commitments to help small enterprises across the EU. A central element of the Act is a commitment to cut the vast administrative burdens faced by small firms in the EU. The European Parliament approved a resolution supporting the SBA on 4 December with all major UK parties supporting the initiative, although UKIP refused to do so. [Malcolm Harbour MEP](#), Conservative Spokesman on the Internal Market said: “Small

businesses and entrepreneurs are the backbone of the economy. In these difficult times, the best thing the EU can do is to get off entrepreneurs' backs. While the Small Business Act could have been more ambitious, it does lay the ground-work for less red tape, and legislation better tailored to micro enterprises. Every small business owner I talk to complains that the British government adds unnecessary burdens to new directives through gold-plating. There is now no excuse whether in Brussels or Whitehall, we all have a duty to think small first.”

### **Imperial measures safe**

A vote in the European Parliament in mid-December confirmed once and for all that imperial measures were to be excluded from EU legislation on units of measurement. The vote followed a long campaign fought by Conservative MEPs. Conservative Industry Spokesman [Giles Chichester MEP](#) said: “Consumers should be able to buy in the measurement of their choice and this vote confirms they can continue to do so.”

### **£74.5 million cost of Labour incompetence**

The European Commission has fined Britain £74.5 million for the Single Farm Payments fiasco that caused misery to farmers across England in 2005. The Rural Payments Agency was dogged by late payments and administrative error and the Government failed to meet the EU's statutory deadline for getting subsidy cheques to English farmers. Conservative Chairman of the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee, [Neil Parish MEP](#), said: “Once again our government's incompetence has caused farmers and the British taxpayer to lose out. As Secretary of State at DEFRA, Margaret Beckett introduced a system for making payments that everybody told her would lead to this calamity, yet she went ahead anyway. Her legacy of blunders reverberates in the countryside even today, yet she still sits around the Cabinet table. That just underlines the level of contempt this government has for the countryside.”

**The European Parliament next meets in plenary on 12-15 January in Strasbourg.** The [Agenda](#) includes: the incoming Czech Presidency of the EU, legislation on pesticides & plant protection, a debate on the transport of animals and reports on relations with the Balkans and with the Mediterranean.