

# Richard Corbett MEP

Labour Member of the European Parliament  
for Yorkshire & Humber

## Quarterly Report

Autumn 2018

## Welcome to my Autumn Newsletter



*As the UK approaches the crucial final months of negotiations over Brexit, I continue to work for my constituents, in Parliament and in Yorkshire & Humber with visits and speaking engagements across the region. I have additional responsibilities within the Labour Party, where, as Leader of our MEPs, I sit in Shadow Cabinet and on the NEC. I also continue to appear regularly on local and national media, as well as writing blogs, briefings, articles and tweeting regularly.*

### 1. Brexit: Time's Ticking Away, Theresa May

Unsurprisingly, little progress was made on the major points of the withdrawal agreement over the summer, despite time running out. EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier politely but firmly pointed out, to nobody's surprise, that Theresa May's Chequers proposal is unworkable, possibly illegal under WTO rules, and does not bridge the gap between the UK and EU on some of the most fundamental areas of disagreement, namely the Irish Border and practical trade arrangements. She seemed to believe that she could go over his head to persuade the EU heads of government, but was firmly rebuffed at the informal summit

in Salzburg in mid-September. Her response the following day insisting that the EU should now provide a solution if they didn't like hers (despite her having been told this for weeks) was a new low for Britain's reputation in and beyond Europe.

Although May managed to avoid using the word Chequers in her speech to Tory conference, she is trapped in a three-way bind between the two wings of her party and the DUP. Two years since the referendum, and Theresa May still has not found a way of negotiating successfully with her own party, let alone the EU27.

While Tory divisions seem as irreconcilable as ever, Labour has clarified that it will oppose a costly, chaotic, Tory Brexit that will damage the economy, jobs and workers' rights. The Brexit motion overwhelming passed at conference, combined with Keir Starmer's platform speech, reaffirmed that Labour will vote against any Brexit deal that is presented to the House of Commons which does meet its six tests. If May cannot get a deal through the Commons, Labour will seek to force a general election. If this is not possible, Labour is open to a public vote on the deal, with an option to retain membership of the EU and all of its benefits and protections.

Theresa May's will no doubt try to create a false choice between her deal (amended Chequers) and a no-deal Brexit, but this is not a real choice, more an attempt at blackmail. Other options (renegotiate for a different deal or reconsider Brexit entirely) are

available. As long as MPs realise that, her deal is unlikely to pass through parliament. Meanwhile, as the Tory incompetence in the negotiations becomes more and more obvious, and as any likely deal will be very different from what was promised by the Leave campaign and Brexit ministers, it is no surprise that support for a public vote (a "People's Vote", rather than just a parliamentary vote) is increasing across the country, with opinion polls showing it has majority support.

The October summit of European Council (NB this report is being written before summit has taken place) was supposed to be the deadline for negotiations. Nobody now expects this to be the case and focus is already shifting to an extraordinary summit in November, solely on Brexit. However, at this stage it is difficult to see how Theresa May can escape from the corner into which she has painted herself.



**Huge crowds at the People's Vote rally in Liverpool during conference.**

## 2. Labour Party Conference

Held in the wonderful city of Liverpool, conference had a very positive atmosphere, with record numbers of delegates attending. It was a pleasure and an honour to have Grimethorpe Colliery Band officially open conference on the Sunday (I arranged this, as Honorary President of the band).

On Brexit, over 150 local Labour parties had tabled contemporary resolutions (another record: the highest number ever on a single subject!), calling for Labour to oppose a damaging, job destroying, Tory Brexit and advocating a public vote on any deal they manage to reach with the EU. And, outside the conference venue, there was a very well attended People's Vote march and rally, with speakers from all parts of the Labour movement.

My speech to conference on Monday as Labour's leader in Europe was well received and

I reflected on the hard work of Labour's MEPs over the past four decades and considered the options ahead on Brexit, as well as sharing my favorite Brexit joke. If you missed it, you can [see a video](#) or [read the text](#) on my website.

I was in the conference hall for the Brexit debate on Tuesday morning and was delighted that Keir Starmer received a standing ovation when he confirmed that the option of remaining in the EU is still on the table.

After speaking at many more fringe events, including the very well attended Yorkshire & Humber Labour reception, and a packed EPLP panel event which attracted national media coverage, my final hours in Liverpool were spent listening to Jeremy Corbyn lay out his vision for the next Labour government, which may be sooner rather than later if the Tories continue to make such a mess, not least on Brexit.



*Delivering my speech to conference, with EPLP colleagues on front row.*

## 3. Close EU-ncounters



While I was attending Harrogate CLP, Tory MP Jacob Rees-Mogg walked past the window. I dashed out to invite him to debate Brexit with me (above left), but he declined. The offer's still open Jacob!

I met Michel Barnier (above right), the EU's Brexit negotiator, who came to the S&D group while we were in Strasbourg to update MEPs on progress in the Brexit talks.

And I also met actor, activist and native Yorkshireman Sir Patrick Stewart (below) at a People's Vote Campaign event.





## 4. European Parliament Updates

### Fisheries Committee

Following a study showing recreational angling had not caused the predicted fall in sea bass numbers, Labour MEPs wrote to the European Commissioner for Fisheries and to the UK Fisheries Minister, George Eustice. In response, the Commission has proposed, subject to the approval of the Council of Ministers, to relax the emergency restrictions and to allow anglers to catch one bass per day between October and December 2018. Sea bass have traditionally been caught by recreational fishers. It is new commercial fisheries, not anglers, who have caused the decline in stocks. The 2 million sea bass anglers across Europe, should be allowed to continue,

especially as sea bass angling has a annual socio-economic value of €200 million a year for coastal economies.

### Constitutional Committee

I have been charged by the EP's Constitutional Committee with making proposals to reform the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure. *Inter alia*, I am looking at the standards of conduct for Members and penalties for not maintaining them (following cases of racist and other abusive language from some of UKIP's friends), the reporting, auditing and transparency of MEP's expenses (applying to the whole EP what most non-UKIP British MEPs already do), the conditions required to constitute



With EPLP colleagues campaigning to save the NHS from a Tory Brexit

a political Group in the EP, voting procedures, and various other issues.

### Save the NHS from a Tory Brexit

Labour MEPs celebrated the 70th birthday of our NHS in July. We also warned about the dangers of a Tory Brexit for our health service. The 'Brexit dividend' which promised more money for our NHS has been exposed as a lie. Brexit risks the UK losing access to EU research and medicines as well as exacerbating the shortage of working EU doctors and nurses. Labour MEPs are calling for a number of measures to alleviate the impact of Brexit on the NHS.

### MEPs vote to discipline Hungary's far-right government

The European Parliament voted by a two thirds majority to initiate procedures against Hungary's far-right government led by Viktor Orban. It follows criticism of the government's violations of core EU values, including suppressing a free media, violating the rule of law, anti-immigration rhetoric and attacks on minorities and religious groups. Labour MEPs proudly voted for the motion, but disgracefully most Tory MEPs voted against, demonstrating that in desperation for support on Brexit, Theresa May's party is prepared to pander to Europe's

far-right. Two Tory MEPs were expelled from their party shortly after they voted against their whip and with the majority of Parliament on this issue.

### Copyright vote

Labour MEPs, voted for new EU copyright laws which aim to ensure fair remuneration for artists while protecting online freedom. There were two key votes: for Article 11, which concerns the protection of press publications, and for Article 13, which focuses on protected content and ensures that performers are remunerated if their work appears on user-uploaded video platforms such as YouTube. In spite of a huge lobbying campaign from tech giants, the vote successfully passed, and the final vote may be as soon as January.

### Dying to Work Campaign

Labour MEPs continue to support the TUC's Dying to Work campaign, and the European Parliament recently voted in favour of a report that backs its aims. The report calls on national governments to ensure workers are provided with all the support they need to return to work after serious injury or illness. It also requires workplaces to support the needs of workers suffering from long-term illness.

## 5. Place Jo Cox



On 27th September, in a formal ceremony, the city of Brussels named a square after Jo Cox to honour the memory of the Yorkshire Labour MP. It is beside the Ancienne Belgique music venue which she often visited in the years she lived in the city. Her sister and parents attended, and [I paid tribute](#) alongside Jeremy Corbyn, the Mayor of Brussels and others.



## 6. Textiles Centre of Excellence, Huddersfield

In June, I visited the Textile Centre of Excellence in Huddersfield. It is a wonderful example of the sort of innovative, cutting-edge research and manufacturing that goes on across Yorkshire and the Humber. But my meeting with Managing Director Bill Macbeth sadly came with some worrying warnings about Brexit. The EU accounted for 74% of the UK's exports of textiles and apparel in 2016, a total of £9.1 billion in trade.

The UK relies on the EU for the material for its clothes as well, with 44% of textiles in the UK are imported from the EU. In London, 70% of the textile manufacturing workforce are EU citizens, while there are approximately 120,000 EU workers in the UK retail industry. Add to that the European funding that has kickstarted many of the research projects at the Centre, and Tory claims about a prosperous Brexit start to unravel at the seams.



*Bill MacBeth showing me the latest anti-counterfeiting tech in his suits.*



## 7. Constituents' Issues

Concerns over Brexit have continued to dominate correspondence from constituents. There are considerable worries over its implications for jobs, businesses and the supply of food and medicine in the UK. I have received numerous emails from constituents who were pleased to see the Labour Party support a motion at Conference which keeps open the possibility of a second referendum and there has been a real show of support for remaining in the EU. Correspondence on other issues has notably included:

- the Syria refugee crisis
- the appalling treatment of asylum seekers in Hungary
- the passage of the Copyright Directive through the European Parliament
- the demolition of settlements in the West Bank
- EU policy to reduce single use disposable plastics
- the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- the welfare of animals being transported across the EU

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## 8. Social Media

Readers may be aware that I have an informative website – [richardcorbett.org.uk](http://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 almost 50,000 followers) and on Facebook: [facebook.com/rcorbett/](https://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 the app 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](http://richardcorbett.org.uk/app)



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

### Yorkshire & Humber:

Textile Centre of Excellence, Huddersfield  
Len Tingle Memorial Service, Leeds  
Doncaster Unite\*  
Keighley AGM\*  
Unite seminar (including Norwegian delegation) at Wortley Hall, Sheffield\*  
Great Northern Brexit conference, Leeds\*  
Meadowfield Primary School Election Fever, Leeds\*  
Fortshot House Farm with NFU, Leeds  
Charity Dinner for Islamic Relief UK and Women's Protection Fund, hosted by Naz Shah MP, Bradford  
Brassed Off Live, Leeds

### Liverpool:

Labour Party Annual Conference  
- Gave EPLP Leader's Speech to Conference  
- Spoke at 5 fringe meetings  
- NEC meetings

### Yorkshire CLPs :

Harrogate & Knaresborough\*  
Shipley\*  
Wakefield\*  
Batley & Spen\*  
Selby & Ainsty\*  
Thirsk & Malton\*  
Keighley\*  
Windhill and Wrose (branch)\*

### Manchester:

TUC General Council

### London:

Inaugural Julian Priestley memorial lecture \*  
Regular NEC, Shadow Cabinet, and Shadow Brexit team meetings  
Lords European Committee\*  
National Policy Forum Joint Policy Committee  
Lord Kerr's Constitutional Commission  
The New European 100th edition celebration  
People's Vote March

### European Parliament:

#### As Chair:

Kashmir Council-EU Mr Ali Raza Syed (all party group 'Friends of Kashmir')  
Bangladesh conference  
Andrew Duff's book launch

#### Visiting UK delegations from:

GMB, UNITE, Eastern Region Labour MEPs, Yorkshire TUC, UK manufacturers' organisation (EEF), Ford

### Meetings:

House of Commons Officials on Brexit procedures  
Commission Vice-President Sefcovic  
Commission Vice-President Timmermans  
EU Brexit negotiator Barnier  
EP Brexit Steering group chair Verhofstadt  
International Rescue Committee (on Rohingya)  
Tim Barrow, UK Permanent Representative (Ambassador) to the EU  
Various Other Ambassadors

### Media appearances include:

BBC Sunday Politics, Yorkshire & Lincolnshire  
Daily Politics  
ITV News  
Sky News  
All Out Politics, Sky  
LBC, Matt Stadlen Show and Iain Dale Show  
TV channels from France, Malta and Belgium  
Radio stations: France /Belgium /Denmark

### Print media includes:

Cover Story, European Parliament Magazine  
British Chamber of Commerce EU Magazine  
Beyond Brexit, published by Fabians & FEPS  
Labour List

My series of **Brexit Briefings** clarify some of the legal implications of Brexit and explain in detail its potential impact on different sectors: [richardcorbett.org.uk/category/brexit-briefings](http://richardcorbett.org.uk/category/brexit-briefings)

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

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