



Around Europe

Quaker Council for European Affairs

No.314 July/August 2009

European Parliament Elections 09

A shift to the right



Joseph Daul (foreground), leader of the EPP, enjoyed greater success than Martin Schulz (background) whose Socialist group PES saw heavy losses

©European Parliament/Pietro Naj-Oleari

As the results began to trickle in on Sunday 7th June it became clear that the European Parliament has taken a clear shift to the right

The centre right European People's Party (EPP) won a simple majority of seats. With 35.9% of the vote, the EPP now have more seats than the Socialists (PES) and Liberals (ALDE) put together and remain the largest group.

The Socialists lost the largest number of votes across Europe falling from 27.6% to 21.9%. Liberals (ALDE) also saw their vote fall. The Greens (Greens/EFA) increased their vote and have become the fourth largest group in the European Parliament. By winning 14 seats, the French Greens contributed significantly to this gain. Fringe parties tended to do well both on the far right and the far left.

The relative success of smaller parties means that 40% of the Parliament's MEPs will not sit in either of the two largest groups. This means that broad agreement among

a smaller number of larger groups will be less likely to gain enough votes to pass decisions, making it more likely that larger groups will need to negotiate with smaller groups, increasing the influence of fringe parties. It will be interesting to see if this results in more debate. Despite this, it is unlikely that there will be a substantial shift in power as allocation of committee seats, which are an important measure of political influence within the Parliament, will remain virtually the same.

The failure by the Socialists can be attributed to a combination of factors including the detrimental effect of infighting, especially in France. The Socialists' difficulty in forming a response to the economic crisis that is significantly different to the centre-right's position may also have contributed to their failure. In several countries, including the UK, Liberals struggled to successfully communicate their pro-European message; a contributing factor in their decline.

A theme running throughout Europe seems to have been that parties campaigned mainly or exclusively on

(See page 2)



©European Parliament/Pietro Naj-Oleari

Should we tolerate the British National Party?

Tolerance is widely seen as a virtue of our age, it is a value held by many, if not most, Quakers. Tolerance however, can easily slip into indifference if one ceases to view a particular belief or behaviour as immoral. How can we, as Quakers, ensure that we avoid this conundrum?

The BNP gained two seats in the European Parliament elections. They are an openly Islamophobic party who see religious tensions as the source of society's ills. They wish to "clamp down" on "a flood" of asylum seekers and re-introduce the death penalty. They are, broadly speaking, intolerant. Indeed, their opponents go as far as to describe their policies as bigoted. Should we, as Quakers, listen and try to understand their views and how they have come to such conclusions?

It is apparent that at the moment there is no shortage of voices condemning the actions and policies of the BNP. There is, however, a distinct lack of listening. Is it possible to listen and try to understand where BNP policies and practices are coming from and yet still avoid slipping into indifference? There is a subtle balance in recognising the humanity of all, whilst still denouncing beliefs that we feel to be fundamentally wrong. It is a balance of personal and private belief, but a balance that Quakers might be well-placed to make.

Steve Hynd

European Parliament Elections 09: A shift to the right

(continued from page 1)

national issues and not on the issues most relevant to the European Parliament. The Labour and Conservative parties in the UK, for example, barely mentioned Europe in any of their party political broadcasts, focusing solely on national issues.

The Greens can no longer be seen as a fringe movement. Their continued success at European level, now becoming the fourth largest group, and their representation within many national and local governments across Europe means they have to be taken seriously as a political movement. Their success may well indicate that the Greens are no longer seen as a single issue party, but also that climate change is being recognised as a central concern. Voters may also recognise that their policies have an important European dimension, despite the continued wary attitude towards Europe by some Greens.

The disastrous failure of Libertas, an anti-EU party led by Declan Ganley who successfully campaigned for the

Irish no-vote to the Lisbon treaty, seems to imply that pan-European euroscepticism is not as successful as the home-grown variety. Ganley himself failed to become an Irish MEP and has said he will not campaign against the Lisbon treaty in the next Irish referendum. Julian Priestly, the former Secretary-General of the European Parliament, claims that parties supporting the Lisbon treaty got 80% of the vote across Europe, making it more likely that the Lisbon treaty will be ratified soon.

The increase in the MEPs elected who currently fall under no European Group is largely due to British Conservatives and the Czech Civic Democrats having both recently left the centre-right European People's Party group. Along with the Polish Justice and Law Party, these two parties aim to form a new anti-federalist group. To do this they need parties from at least seven Member States to join them which could mean alliances with far-right parties, something that might compromise the British Conservative Party leader, David Cameron's attempt to create a progressive image.

Anya Whiteside

**If you are attending
Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering this year
don't forget to come and visit the QCEA stall**



Confessions of a climate criminal...



There's a running joke in the QCEA office initiated by our policy officer for energy security and reiterated by the other programme assistants, that I am a 'climate criminal'. You may not be familiar with this term so I have requested a definition from the QCEA employees and the response came back as 'a person perceived to emit more than her sustainable share of greenhouse gas emissions'. I feel compelled to point out that this title is bestowed upon me in a good-natured way and is not evidence of Quaker values going to pot in Brussels. I am, however, ashamed to admit that it is a rather accurate depiction of me. Let me clarify this for you - I am not a criminal, I am aware of climate change but there are certain aspects of my everyday life that would suggest otherwise....I spent the past year hopping on and off planes, my Mini gets exercised to the value of a couple of hundred miles a week, I adore the Grand Prix (much to the horror of my employers) and I sleep with the light on. Consequently my carbon footprint is more akin to that of the jolly green giant than that of a climate-conscious consumer. Or at least it was.

It's pretty hard to work for an NGO which focuses a large portion of its time on energy security and not pick up a few things along the way, even if, like me, you work with your headphones in. In addition to this I also have the pleasure of living with two people who recycle EVERYTHING (even toilet seats, seriously!). Needless to say it's gradually filtered into my consciousness that, just maybe, I'm living my life in a way that is slightly unsympathetic to the environment.

I've been introduced to the concept of the 'green scale' meaning that you don't have to suddenly become an eco-warrior to help save the planet but you do need to find a way of living sustainably that fits into your

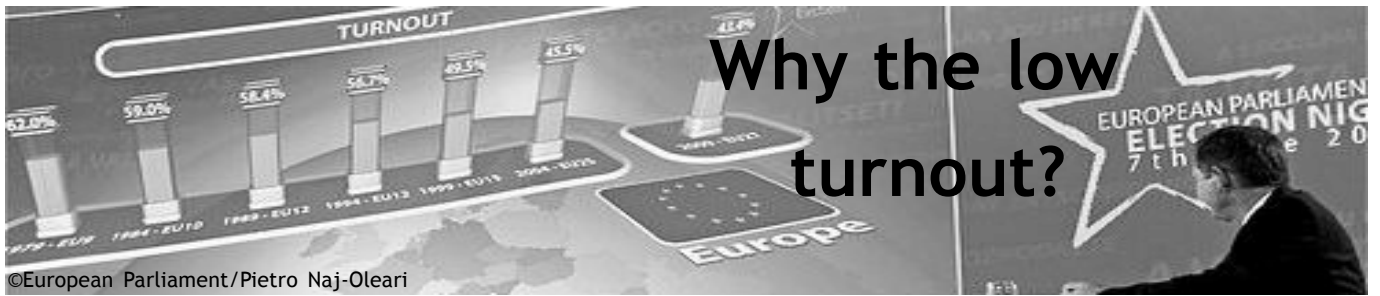
priorities. Travel has always been fundamental to my lifestyle and I'm not prepared to give it up entirely, but maybe I don't have to? Let me introduce you to a report conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. They estimated that livestock reared for consumption were responsible for 18% of greenhouse gas emissions, that's a bigger share than that of transport. Eating meat is an element of my life that I am prepared to change. Don't get me wrong, I love a good steak but I love travelling more. Avoiding buying meat coupled with the attempt to travel as carbon neutral as possible has made 'doing my bit' a little more realistic. Never in a month of Sundays will I cycle 15 miles to work in the rain when I have a lovely comfy car...but I might take the bus. I'm far from perfect but I'm getting there.

I think it's fair to say that my enthusiasm for tackling climate change is growing, but I must confess that when my number came up to attend the Friends of the Earth roundtable on Development and Climate Change I wasn't exactly jumping up and down on my seat to go. The forum was being held in anticipation of the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December and sought to address the issue of the impact that climate change is having upon the world's poorer countries and their development. Here was an angle on climate change that I hadn't considered before, how could my actions affect people in these situations?

The morning was spent listening to the discussants illustrating that in fact they do. Patrick McMullan painted a picture of the effect of climate change upon the Maldives. 40 to 50% of the population and 99% of hotels on these inhabited islands lie within 100 metres of the shorelines with the average height above sea level being 1.9 to 2 metres, quite a challenge then for these islands to adapt to rising sea levels. And rising sea levels and flash floods are a clear consequence of excessive greenhouse gas emissions.

To bring the matter closer to home, it was reported that the flood barriers along the Thames were intended to be used once every three years when in fact they are being put to use six times a year! The most apt view of the discussion was voiced by Bianca Jagger, Chair of the World Future Council, who pointed out that the developed world has a responsibility for its actions and for helping the still developing world from the consequences of our actions. She hit the nail on the head by defining the developed world as having 'an irrational and uncontrollable addiction to fossil fuels'. Now that's food for thought.

Faye Morten



©European Parliament/Pietro Naj-Oleari

Why the low turnout?

The 2009 European Parliament elections saw voter turnout remain low at 43.2%, down from 45.5% last time. The lowest turnout rate was in Slovakia with 19.6%, whilst the highest was in Luxembourg with 91%, unsurprisingly as it is one of the few countries in the EU with compulsory voting. The newer Member States also maintained their track record of low voter turnout despite the high popularity the EU enjoys in these countries. If those who are pro the EU still believe that voting in the European Parliament is pointless, it raises serious concerns about the European Parliament's legitimacy.

A voter turnout of 43.2% does not give the European Parliament a strong mandate. This is particularly worrying, given that if the Lisbon treaty is ratified, the European Parliament's influence will significantly increase through the extension of co-decision. Interest in the European Parliament seems to be decreasing at the same time as its power and influence is increasing. Whether the low turnout is a result of euroscepticism, a lack of understanding of European issues or voters feeling that their votes won't make a difference, it raises important questions for the European Parliament. MEPs need to address these questions if their claim to

be the only part of the EU directly elected by its citizens is to hold weight.

BBC World correspondent, Shirin Wheeler, believes that both the media and European citizens need clear messages and personalities to engage with. Voters may also find it difficult to understand what the European Parliament does and therefore struggle to engage in debating key issues. The complicated three pillar structure makes it very hard to know what influence the Parliament has over different policies, making it unclear how an individual's votes will tangibly change EU policy.

The European Parliament now faces a new term with many challenges. Over the next few weeks and months we will see deals for key positions taking place and it will become clearer who the real movers and shakers in the new Parliament will be. Climate change, coupled with economic downturn, will be key issues that are hardly likely to yield simple answers. The question of institutional reform and the ratification of the Lisbon treaty are likely to continue to lurk in the background. It remains to be seen how the new European Parliament will fare with thrashing out responses to the multiple and complex issues facing Europe.

Anya Whiteside

Take out an annual *Around Europe* Subscription! 22•/£16 for hard copies, 15•/£10 for e-mailed copies. For information on how to subscribe to *Around Europe* or to become a QCEA Associate or Supporting Member please visit our website at: www.quaker.org/qcea, ring us on 0032 2 234 3061 or write to us. We look forward to hearing from you.



Around Europe

Quaker Council for European Affairs aisbl
Square Ambiorix 50, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium
Editeur responsable : Elizabeth Scurfield
N° entreprise 0420.346.728
www.quaker.org/qcea - info@qcea.org
Périodique mensuel. Bureau de dépôt : Bruxelles X

Belgique-België
P.P.-P.B.
Bruxelles X
BC 8843