

European Elections – What Happened

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Henry McCubbin was a Member of the European Parliament from 1989 to 1994. He is a regular contributor to Scottish Left Review, to whom we make grateful acknowledgements.

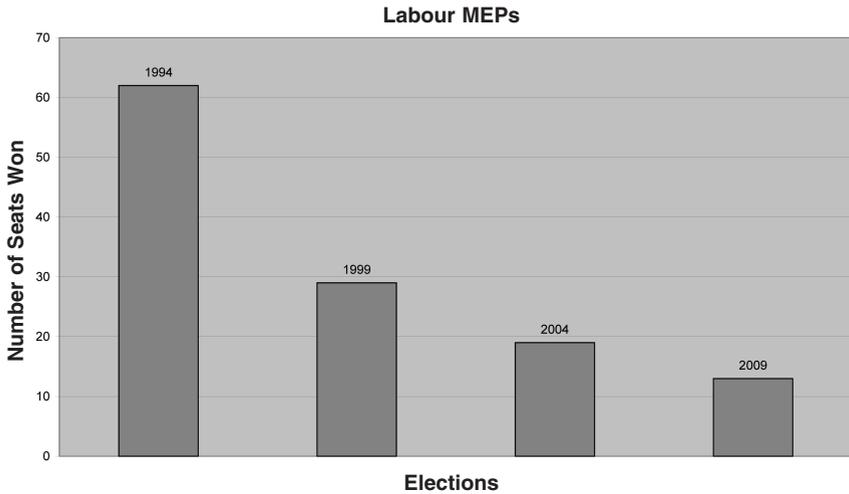
The 2009 European elections must surely make Europe's socialist parties realise that triangulation with capitalist forces leads to nothing less than political strangulation. The pathetic state of the British Labour Party is the most telling. The distribution of support is clear from the table below. The party has fallen to third place behind, of all things, UKIP.

UK Total MEP Seats

Party	Votes		MEPs	
	%	+/- %	Total	+/-
CON	27.7	1.0	*26	1
UKIP	16.5	0.3	13	1
LAB	15.7	-6.9	13	-5
LD	13.7	-1.2	11	1
GRN	8.6	2.4	2	0
BNP	6.2	1.3	2	2
SNP	2.1	0.7	2	0
PC	0.8	-0.1	1	0
OTH	8.5	2.4	0	0
SF	–	–	1	0
DUP	–	–	1	0

72 of 72 seats declared. Vote share figures exclude Northern Ireland as it has a separate electoral system to the rest of the UK. *Includes Ulster Conservatives and Unionists – New Force (UCUNF MEP) elected in Northern Ireland.

Labour's precipitate decline has been on its way from before the hopeless Jack Straw changed the voting system in such a way as to concentrate power over candidate selection to the centre. This is a policy which is the only discernably consistent one in the numerous constitutional tweaks brought in under New Labour. The cliff-like decline in support only has its comparison with the decline of the economy under Gordon Brown, and is shown below in election on election series.



Labour's contribution to the socialist struggle has been a negative one with its instructions to its MEPs, through the despicable privatiser 'Postman' Pat McFadden, to attack workers' rights, whether so-called 'posted' workers or all workers through their blocking tactics over working time. In fact the only positive contribution they made was to reduce the number of MEPs to send to the European Parliament. You could discover Dutch liberals with a better left voting record than Labour MEPs such as Michael Cashman.

What is now clear is that the European People's Party (EPP) conservative alliance has reinforced its position in the European Parliament, and will clearly be the dominant group, although their total number of MEPs has been reduced, and their votes merely stabilised in comparison to 2004. Right wing leaders in power have, however, been confirmed as the first political force, such as Sarkozy and Tony Blair's friend Berlusconi.

The big losers were undoubtedly the socialists, who not only diminished their delegation, but also keep widening the distance in numbers of representatives between themselves and the conservatives. Additionally, they lost their positions at the national level in several countries, including the United Kingdom, where they are the governing party.

Liberals roughly kept their parliamentary representation, losing only 2 MEPs. They have approached the socialists in terms of parliamentary balance, as the latter shed 20 seats, five of who were formerly UK Labour.

The greens were the only group to raise their representation significantly (41 to 54 seats, more than 30%), while the GUE-NGL group, where the European Left (EL) members are represented, diminished from 37 to 35 MEPs. The GUE lost all representation from Italy where the left broke into

small fractions and won nothing. We need only to look at the left's scattered support in Scotland to see that such behaviour is not nation specific.

However, beyond the general picture, there were mixed messages from the electorate around Europe. For example, in Portugal the Left Bloc (EL member) and the Communist Party had altogether more than 21% of votes (10.7% both) and Bloc significantly tripled its representation, now having three elected MEPs. In Germany, Die Link elected one more MEP, and in France the Front de Gauche elected two more. In Cyprus, AKEL (EL observer party) kept its strong position, only a few decimals behind the conservatives, with 34% of votes. Elsewhere in Europe other smaller progressive and left parties had positive results.

Greece did provide some respite in that the left, including PASOK, overtook the right. We can safely assume that the social turmoil last winter in Athens, where the left sided with the young demonstrators, may have contributed to this situation. In general, however, the results for the left, together with the socialists' results, and the fact that the latter are in power in several countries implementing contested policies, such as Portugal and Spain (where the right wing won), is a reminder about the challenges and difficult tasks for the left to build and publicly deliver an alternative political programme, recognizable as such by the electorate.

The wide and empty electoral space presented in these elections to the alternative left and those of progressive social protest, which has been created by the socialist parties and the failure of the dominant neoliberal model of development, therefore remained unoccupied by radical thinking from any sort of unified political movement of the European left or, in many cases, from the nation state left political field. Overall, and even including the results of the greens (as in the United Kingdom, and especially in France, where the greens more than doubled their result), it was mainly the right wing that gained from dissatisfaction across the European Union. This fact must not be exaggerated, since it was also accompanied by a general stabilization of voting compared to 2004. More than that, for instance in Portugal, the winning right party had a result not far from its historical lowest level.

On the other hand, the increase of conservative support was also worryingly linked to the right wing extremists in some countries. This is a particular danger for democracy and another challenge to democratic forces willing to protest constructively, attracting votes and building alternatives. The European Left alerted us to this problem in its electoral platform, characterized not only by the general crisis, but also by deep dissatisfaction and mistrust in politicians and their lack of ethics. This is patently clear in the United Kingdom with the scandals about parliamentarians' private expenses paid with public money.

Seats by political group in each Member State (provisional 11 June 2009)

	EPP	PES	ALDE	UEN	GREENS/ EFA	GUE/ NGL	IND/ DEM	Others	Total
 BE	6	5	5	0	3	0	0	3	22
 BG	6	4	5	0	0	0	0	2	17
 CZ	2	7	0	0	0	4	0	9	22
 DK	1	4	3	2	2	1	0	0	13
 DE	42	23	12	0	14	8	0	0	99
 EE	1	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	6
 IE	4	3	1	3	0	0	0	1	12
 EL	8	8	0	0	1	3	2	0	22
 ES	23	21	2	0	2	1	0	1	50
 FR	29	14	6	0	14	4	1	4	72
 IT	35	0	7	9	0	0	0	21	72
 CY	2	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	6
 LV	1	0	1	3	1	0	0	2	8
 LT	4	3	2	2	0	0	0	1	12
 LU	3	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	6
 HU	15	4	0	0	0	0	0	3	22
 MT	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
 NL	5	3	6	0	3	2	2	4	25
 AT	6	4	0	0	2	0	0	5	17
 PL	28	7	0	15	0	0	0	0	50
 PT	10	7	0	0	0	5	0	0	22
 RO	13	11	5	0	1	0	0	3	33
 SI	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	7
 SK	6	5	0	1	0	0	0	1	13
 FI	4	2	4	0	2	0	0	1	13
 SE	5	5	4	0	2	1	0	1	18
 UK	0	13	11	0	5	1	13	29	72
 EU total	264	161	80	35	53	32	18	93	736

- EPP : Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
- PES : Socialist Group in the European Parliament
- ALDE : Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
- UEN : Union for Europe of the Nations Group
- GREENS/ EFA : Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance
- GUE/ NGL : Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left
- IND/ DEM : Independence/Democracy Group
- Others : Others

Without prejudice to the composition of the European Parliament at the inaugural session on 14 July 2009