

PART I

1979-84

Elected to withdraw

The Scene

The first five years of the democratically elected European Parliament had a reluctant Labour Group split down the middle on membership of the European Community. Budgetary problems, the British rebate and agricultural over-production dominated the debates. Thatcherism, unemployment and recession took hold in the UK. The Parliament, without much power apart from the ability to block the budget, was seen in the UK as a mere talking shop. The Labour Party was committed to withdrawal. Cruise missiles caused dismay. Debates began on the draft Treaty on European Union. The Isoglucose judgement of the Court of Justice in 1980 gave Parliament a de facto delaying power on legislation. Some Labour Members changed their mind on EEC membership. Four of them were to migrate to the House of Commons by the end of the five year period. The Labour Party at home was facing internal battles against the Trotskyist Militant Tendency. The 1983 general election was decisively won by the Conservatives. By the end of the Parliament three Labour Members had been deselected, one of whom defected to the pro-European SDP- Liberal Alliance.

Hard times

It was the worst of times for Labour. The world's first direct elections to a multinational parliament in June 1979 came just five weeks after the Callaghan Labour government's shattering landslide defeat to Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives. The successful Conservative slogan was epitomized in a broadsheet poster advertisement entitled "Labour Isn't Working". The Labour government had lost a confidence vote following the "winter of discontent", a failed incomes policy, the demise of the Lib-Lab pact and on 1 March the failure of the Scottish and Welsh devolution referenda. Even Cabinet Minister Shirley Williams had lost her House of Commons seat. (Williams came back for the SDP in the Crosby by-election in November 1981 but lost it to the Conservatives in 1983.) Morale was at rock bottom. Worse still, a substantial proportion of Labour Party members and MPs were not convinced of the merits of contesting the European elections at all. The timing could not have been worse. The electorate and the parties were weary, with disunity and half-heartedness the order of the day.

The Labour Party had not yet recovered from its splits during the 1975 referendum on membership of the EEC. Many members had campaigned for a "No" vote and the two-to-one national majority in favour of membership still rested uneasily upon the left body politic. Whilst most Labour Party members considered themselves internationalists, they were generally of the view that the EEC was a "capitalist club". Castle thought it perpetuated Cold War divisions. The party had only reluctantly filled its empty seats in the UK delegation to the European Parliamentary Assembly after the referendum, having boycotted any participation from Britain's accession in 1973 until late 1975. Labour in government had declined to join the European Monetary System that came into operation in March 1979, leaving that to the new Conservative administration. There was an internal argument as to whether Labour should fight the elections at all but John Prescott, Leader of the Labour Group in the Assembly, wrote in *Labour Weekly* that it was the "least worst solution". He maintains that even at that early stage it was evident to some that the pro-Europeans were working up to a breakaway party.

The party was engaged in an internal right versus left battle over the right to reselect MPs, greater grass roots involvement in policy making and the rise of women's committees on councils and black sections within the party. Internal struggles in constituency party organizations between moderates, Militants and the traditional left had reached a peak and elections for the European Parliament did not rise to the top of many activists' agenda. As a result, the election campaign was notable for its lack of enthusiasm, and this gave Labour a woeful result. The Conservatives returned sixty of the eighty-one UK MEPs, Labour seventeen and the SNP one. Voting by proportional representation, Northern Ireland returned one SDLP (John Hume), one Democratic Unionist (Reverend Ian Paisley), both of whom held dual mandates with the House of Commons and one Ulster Unionist (John Taylor). The Liberal Party, despite 12.6% of the vote, won no seats at all under the UK's first-past-the-post system, to discontent on their part. Overall turnout, reflecting the electorate's lack of interest in voting in two consecutive months, was 31.6%, the lowest in Europe. Some parts of the country had turnouts substantially lower than that and many Constituency Labour Parties boycotted the campaign.

The vagaries of the electoral system assisted the Conservatives. Given 45% of the vote they won three-quarters of the seats, with Labour's 31% only giving it one-fifth of the Members, in part due to poor turnout in traditional Labour-voting urban areas. Only two Labour MEPs were returned for Scotland. Another factor was that the hastily drawn up constituency boundaries were felt to be less than favourable to Labour. In particular, big cities such as London were divided as slices on a cake, with the thinnest part at the Labour-voting centre, and the widest part of the wedge on the Conservative peripheries.

The election had been delayed across Europe from the planned date of 1978 because of arguments in the House of Commons over whether it should be run on a system of proportional representation as elsewhere, or first-past-the-post as in UK domestic elections. The lengthy debate caused delays in the passage of the European Assembly Elections Bill. The 1977 White Paper on European elections faced six votes against it in Cabinet alone and eventually ran out of parliamentary time. The Act, when finally passed in 1978, supported the UK's electoral status quo and specifically opposed any increase in the powers of the European Parliament. Immediately after this Act was signed Labour conference voted for withdrawal from the EEC.

Labour's band of seventeen in Strasbourg consisted of local Councillors, public sector workers and polytechnic lecturers, led by their only star, Barbara Castle. She had substantial Cabinet experience in Harold Wilson's Labour governments, and was a committed anti-marketeer. There were four women, four academics, one journalist, one local government worker, a teacher, one from the private sector, two Labour movement administrators, one former MP and no previous Assembly Members. Most had trade union or Co-operative movement backing. Twelve were Councillors, some of whom kept their seats until the next local government election. Well over half were firmly against the Common Market. Many of them would have preferred to have been in the House of Commons rather than this new so-called Parliament with few powers, and a good number of them had unsuccessfully tried to win seats at

general elections and were to try for a seat again in the future. Indeed, by the end of the first parliamentary term, four of this intake had become MPs, with a further three taking the Westminster road three years later.

In contrast, the large Conservative team included businessmen, bankers, four peers and three former MPs, six knights, a former ambassador, journalists, lawyers, landowners and eight former Members from the Assembly. Amongst them were six former Commission officials. Sir Peter Vanneck was a former Lord Mayor of the City of London; Sir Fred Warner was former Ambassador to Tokyo and the UN. Sir Fred Catherwood was one time Chief Economic adviser to the Department of Economic Affairs and director general of the National Economic Development Council. Sir Tom Normanton had ministerial experience and had been a MEP since 1973. Basil de Ferranti was deputy chair of Ferranti Ltd and past president of ECOSOC. David Harris was chief political correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* and a former Member of the GLC. Madron Seligman was marketing director of a firm with sixty world-wide companies and the oldest Oxford friend of former Prime Minister Ted Heath. Sir David Nicholson was Chairman of Rothmans International. Stanley Johnson, father of Boris and not as right-wing, had been head of the environmental pollution division of the European Commission. Only five of the Conservatives were women. In contrast to today's Conservatives, they were in favour of the EEC and had a strategic idea of the way they wanted to shape events and protect their business interests. Members have since said they felt this was the best intake they ever had. They were on a surge of optimism at the start of the Thatcher era.

Labour candidates

None of the Members of the earlier European Assembly were candidates for Labour. The selection process had been lacklustre to say the least. It was only in October 1978 that conference approved the procedure for selection of candidates and proposals for MEPs' accountability to the party. Each local constituency party was entitled to send ten delegates to a European Co-ordinating Committee covering European constituencies to constitute the selection body and not all parties sent their full quota of delegates. There was unsurprisingly far greater enthusiasm from the right-wing pro-European minority in the party to take part and show up to selection meetings than from the left, who in the main were against the whole process.

The pro-Europeans' chief coordinator was Jim Cattermole, Chair of the first Labour Committee for Europe (LCE) and a former Labour regional organizer. Cattermole, who died in 2007, was a strong figure in the Labour Movement for Europe for many years and at that time was busily organizing for as many pro-marketeers as possible to be selected in winnable seats. Traditionally from the 1960s to that time Labour's pro-Europeans tended to be enthusiastic federalists and substantially on the right of the party, so his efforts did not bear a great deal of fruit.

The Labour Party had required any sitting MP to announce they would stand down at the next general election before they could be eligible to stand as candidates for the European Parliament. A number did so, including Michael Barnes and Dick Leonard – rebels on EEC votes in the past. However they were not selected. Barbara Castle was the only former Labour

MP who was both selected and elected. Other well-known Labour pro-Europeans (such as Dr Ernest Wistrich in Cleveland, Director of the European Movement) did not win their seats.

Prominent former MPs, too, were absent. In part at least this was because Labour MPs knew that in contrast to their continental colleagues, they could not progress to ministerial office if they were in the European Parliament rather than the House of Commons. Once they left, their route into government closed down. Sir Geoffrey de Freitas, a pro-marketeer, had been a Labour MP from 1945 on and off. He had a stint as a British High Commissioner in Africa and considerable European experience, as President of the Council of Europe from 1966-69 (a Member of that body from 1950-70) and one of the Labour delegates to the European Parliament from 1975-79. He might have lent some weight to the British Labour Group but did not move (and died in 1983). Similarly, Dr Colin Phipps who had been Labour MP for Dudley West from 1974-79 and before that for Walthamstow East (and was regarded as a right-wing federalist) stood down from Westminster but also did not get his name on a ballot paper. He later became a founding member of the SDP. Labour's policy of abolition of the House of Lords doubtless swung the balance against selecting a peer, ensuring that even Lord (Donald) Bruce of Donnington, an active member of the Labour delegation to the European Assembly from 1975-79 and a former editor of the left-wing paper *Tribune*, was not in the running. John Prescott MP, Leader of the former Labour Group, did not put himself forward, preferring to stay in Westminster.

Julian Priestley, a pro-market European Parliament official later to be General Secretary of the Socialist Group and then of the Parliament itself, was an unsuccessful Labour candidate in his home town of Plymouth in the general elections in 1974, 1979 and 1983, but did not put himself forward as a European candidate. "The time was never quite right", he said, "and then my European Parliament career was taking off."

Having been dropped from Callaghan's Cabinet in April 1976, Castle was not finding the back benches to her taste and had already told her Blackburn constituency party in 1978 that she would not stand for re-election to the House of Commons. As such, at nearly seventy, she was available to serve. Her political adviser and protégé Jack Straw had been selected to stand for her House of Commons seat. Barbara's husband, Labour life peer Ted Castle, was one of Labour's nominated Members of the Assembly, and she had accompanied him a few times on trips to Strasbourg and even more exotic locations. Her autobiography *Fighting All the Way* (Castle, 1993), reveals that Jo Richardson MP wanted to put her forward as Chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission but Barbara was not taken by that proposal. She was a political animal through and through. When she was approached by party workers in the North West asking if she would stand, she records that the idea interested her. "We anti-marketeers had to face the realities," she wrote.

"We had been defeated on both the issues to which we were opposed. If there was to be a directly elected European Parliament, ought we not to be inside it, fighting the creeping federalism we could sense on every hand? I had never believed in vacating any political platform for the Tories to occupy."

To this day, some party workers from the North West recall the passion behind her speeches to this effect. Of the selection process itself, Castle says it was long, and “the delegates [in Greater Manchester North] were as indifferent to, and ignorant of, Europe as most of the electors were, so they jumped at the idea of having a candidate who was nationally known.” She was opposed by a young local Councillor Glyn Ford, who went on to be elected himself in 1984.

Joyce Quin (now Baroness Quin) was selected for and won South Tyne and Wear as Labour’s second youngest Member. One of a small band who were members of the European Movement, she had some European experience, having been a researcher in the Labour Party International Department early in the 1970s and as a linguist had travelled to the Council of Europe with parliamentary delegations and there met many European politicians. She faced some formidable opposition at her selection and had started with only a Fabian Society nomination. Later when she contested selection for her parliamentary seat, she faced opposition from a Militant candidate. On election she was the only female politician in the North East and as a result always enjoyed good media coverage.

Win Griffiths in Wales, a moderate pro-marketeer, former history teacher, Councillor and member of CND, had attempted to stand for Westminster but had not won the selection. “This was lucky”, he said in retrospect, “since I won selection for Europe on the fourth ballot and stayed for two terms”. He was lucky a second time in declining to stand for Westminster in 1983, saying that he felt he should undertake two terms in Europe, as Labour lost the seat. He was then persuaded to run in 1987, when Labour won, sending him to Westminster as MP for Bridgend, the only MP who won a non-Labour seat.

Ken Collins, another moderate pro-market Councillor and European Movement member, former apprentice metallurgist and town planner, went on to become the longest serving Chair of the Environment Committee, a powerful figure in the Parliament, and Deputy Leader of the Labour Group. He only narrowly squeaked his selection, however, by one vote on the third ballot. He could not have been more different from his neighbour in Glasgow, Janey Buchan, who was left-wing and anti-market. They were not the best of friends throughout their term.

It has been estimated (Butler and Marquand, 1981) that despite the anti-market climate, just over thirty of the seventy-eight Labour candidates were pro-market, although not many of them were elected. One example was the East London pro-market candidate, Peter O’Neill, a freelance journalist. He was selected at least partly because some of the left-wing inner city parties (still absorbed with their internal battles against Militant) did not send all their delegates to the selection meeting, leaving the field at the mercy of the traditionally more right-wing parties from the Essex end of the constituency. Election canvassing in Labour areas of London East was almost non-existent and very little literature was distributed. The Conservatives won and he later defected to the SDP. In later years piles of undelivered leaflets could be found languishing in party members’ garages and dusty corners of Labour halls.

Alf Lomas (Leader of the British Labour Group 1985-87) was selected as an anti-marketeer in London North East against another anti-marketeer,

Ron Leighton, a founder of the Labour Common Market Safeguards Committee and fond of spouting facts and figures about the iniquities of the CAP. By the time of the European election Leighton had become MP for Newham North East. Lomas, a former railway signaller then political secretary for the London Co-op, had a congenial and persuasive manner of speaking. He was selected on the first ballot with around seventy votes and says that Ron only won fifteen. Lomas and Richard Balfe (a Greater London Councillor until 1977), although unlikely friends, had a common bond in that they had both been opposite numbers in the London and Southern Region Co-operative movements. Lomas later said Balfe did not fit any particular ideological slot.

One outstanding victor of the elections was Roland Boyes, a local government researcher from Durham and strong defender of social policies for the working class who later became an MP (1983-97) for Houghton and Washington. He was also a talented photographer. Fraser Kemp, his successor as MP, said that Boyes' selection speech in 1978 was "inspirational, speaking about the need for working people to have representation at every level". A strong anti-marketeer at the outset, Boyes was later to soften his position, partly under the influence of colleague Ann Clwyd. (She had fought Westminster seats unsuccessfully in 1970 and 1974.) Tam Dalyell, who was an MEP from 1976-79, maintained contact with various European Parliament officials during the 1980s, and asked which of the Labour Members was making an impact. It seems that Boyes was always mentioned.

The other members of that first Labour team were: Gordon Adam, a Northumbrian mining engineer who had fought in general elections in 1966 and 1974 and a by-election in November 1973; Richard Balfe, Political Secretary of Royal Arsenal Co-op; Janey Buchan, a Strathclyde Regional Councillor, Richard Caborn, a Sheffield trade unionist; Ann Clwyd, a Welsh journalist; Derek Enright, a Leeds schoolmaster and Yorkshire Councillor; Michael Gallagher a former miner and Leader of Nottingham Council; Brian Key, the youngest, a Barnsley Councillor and Yorkshire local government officer who had been active in the European Socialist Youth Movement; Tom Megahy MBE, a lecturer and first Leader of Kirklees Council; Dr Barry Seal, a Yorkshire polytechnic lecturer and Councillor; and Allan Rogers, a Welsh geologist. Adam, Boyes, Buchan, Collins, Enright, Gallagher, Griffiths, Key, Megahy, Seal and Rogers, were all local or County Councillors, quite a number of them having been Council Leaders or chairs of committees. Balfe, formerly from the Foreign Office, had been a GLC Chair of Housing and had fought Paddington South in the election of 1970. Lomas was Co-op and Castle had been an MP.

Some of the candidates who were not elected at that time came to prominence in later years in other ways but only Michael Elliott made the eventual journey to the European Parliament. He won London West in 1984 and served as an MEP until 1999, but stood unsuccessfully in Bedfordshire against Conservative Peter Beazley in this first election. He was pro-market and very keen to fight in the first European election, but was not on that occasion selected in his home seat of Ealing in West London, where he was a Councillor. Ian White, a pro-marketeer from Bristol attempted to get selected but was not to succeed until 1989. Albert Bore (now Sir Albert, who later became Leader of Birmingham City Council and then President of the Committee of the Regions

in Brussels), came close to winning in Birmingham South, standing unsuccessfully against Conservative Norvella Forster. Mildred Gordon, later a Campaign Group MP, fought unsuccessfully in London North West as an anti-marketeer against Conservative Lord Bethell. Tony Hart, later a GLC Member and the husband of Dame Judith Hart (the Labour government Minister who played a major role in securing the Lome Convention of 1975), fought Shelagh Roberts, herself a Conservative GLC member (1970-81), in London South West. John Ennals, an academic and son of David Ennals (former head of Labour's International Department and then an MP and Secretary of State for Social Services), stood in Thames Valley against Conservative Baroness Elles who later became a European Parliament Vice-President. Steve Bundred, later Chief Executive of the Audit Commission, stood in London South East against Sir Brandon Rhys Williams MP. In Liverpool a Militant candidate, Terry Harrison, was put up and the Conservatives enjoyed a swing of 11% to them from their high vote in the general election a month before, with one of the lowest turnouts in the UK at 23.7%. There was only one minority ethnic candidate, P.S. Jariwala in Hampshire West.

Labour's left of centre activist grouping Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC), with a majority of anti-marketeers on its executive at the time, was wedded to the Alternative Economic Strategy based on controls on trade and capital movements which many felt was incompatible with the Treaty of Rome. Frances Morrell, a founder member who had worked for Tony Benn when he was Secretary of State for Energy was a member of its Executive and a GLC Member from 1981-86 (and subsequently leader of ILEA until its abolition), was in favour of a more positive approach to Europe but sceptical of its institutions, believing in international socialist co-operation. The Committee was formed in 1979 and its first Executive included people with an extraordinary mixture of views on the EEC, including Bob Cryer MP, Stuart Holland MP, Chris Mullin (later an MP and government Minister), Jeff Rooker MP, Michael Meacher MP, Brian Sedgemore MP and Audrey Wise MP. Nevertheless, after much discussion, the Committee drew up eleven probing questions for prospective candidates that were circulated to Constituency Labour Parties. There was no doubt from the way the questions were framed that the "correct" answers would be anti-market.

Manifesto machinations

European policy at the Labour Party (then at Transport House in Smith Square) was handled jointly by the Research Department, headed by Geoff Bish and by the International Department, headed by Jenny Little. Both of these individuals were anti-market. It was the latter who sent representatives to meetings of the Confederation of European Socialist Parties (Confed), together with National Executive Committee (NEC) members where the European manifesto was drawn up. The composition of staff in both departments was mainly anti-EEC and the same went for the NEC itself. Inside headquarters Nick Sigler was working on the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and Europe in the Research Department and argued that Europe was a domestic issue. Always a Euroseptic, Sigler wrote substantial policy documents over two decades for the party. On the other side, David Blackman, a pro-marketeer working for the Socialist

Group in the European Parliament, was co-opted on to a European sub-committee as a specialist. A pro-EEC academic from Lancaster University, David Lowe, was also co-opted and by 1982 he too was working for the Parliament in Brussels. At the time of this first election he was writing briefing notes for Eric Heffer, frontbench spokesman on European affairs and recalls Heffer telling him: “don’t come to me with the facts – I just want to get England out of the Common Market”. According to Lowe, despite this, Heffer was not by any means an isolationist or nationalist, and was not against “Europe”, but against the “capitalist EEC” and always remained baffled as to why no other Socialist party in Europe agreed with him on something which he felt was so obvious.

The EEC Liaison Committee was set up in March 1979 and became the de facto campaign committee, being chaired by Tony Benn who had become strongly anti-market. Disputes about whether the Parliamentary Labour Party should be involved in drawing up the manifesto left the PLP thwarted.

Labour’s ideological divide on Europe was largely a left versus right split in the 1970s and 1980s, although there were some exceptions. In general the pro-marketeters were seen as the intellectuals from the Croslandite/Gaitskellite wing of the party. There was a massive battle going on for the heart and soul of the Labour Party between the right, who had formed the Manifesto Group, on one hand and Militant supporters who were seeking to take control of the left on the other, squeezing the Tribune Group who were the more traditional left. Michael Foot and Tony Benn had, amongst others on the left, been strongly against direct elections to the European Parliament, as was Clive Jenkins, leader of the influential white collar trade union ASTMS. Most of the Labour Party saw themselves as internationalists, but were more interested in solidarity with the Commonwealth and developing countries than in Europe.

During the time of the Labour delegation to the unelected European Assembly (1975-79), Peter Shore MP, a prominent anti-marketeter, opposed the Members joining the Socialist Group on the grounds that the latter was comprised of “dangerously federalist social democrats, irredeemably compromised by sitting in national coalition governments with centre and right-wing parties” (Broad, 2001). The Secretary of the Common Market Safeguards Committee, John Mills, insisted that direct elections were neither sanctioned by the referendum nor written into the Treaty of Accession. Anti-marketeters harboured fears for Britain’s sovereignty and British democracy, Castle calling it a “rich man’s club” and fearing it would prop up Cold War divisions. Anti-EEC feelings were still strong, as seen by the 1978 Labour Party conference passing composite resolution 42 calling for Labour’s next election manifesto to include the:

“amendment of the European Communities Act to restore to the Commons the power to decide whether any EEC Regulation, Directive or Decision should apply in Britain, to reform fundamentally the CAP to permit freer food imports and deficiency payments, to curtail the powers of the Commission, to give express right to the Member states to pursue their own economic, industrial and regional policies, to reject EMU, and to ensure that Britain could keep the benefits of its indigenous fuels”.

This was despite John Prescott MP, former Leader of the Labour Group in the Assembly and himself a Eurosceptic, saying he felt it would not be possible for Britain to leave the EEC.

With this bi-polar mindset, the manifesto was being negotiated on two fronts – in Europe and at home. The Confed had prepared a draft manifesto as early as June 1977 but it was proving difficult to reconcile the positions of socialist parties across Europe. The British sent observers only to the working parties, refusing to take part in their deliberations. The UK party's negative attitude had ensured that by June 1978 the text had been modified, particularly in terms of curtailing any transfer of powers from national governments to Community institutions. The Brits were not the only ones who were proving difficult, since the French were also finding disagreements, this time on enlargement policies. There was a stumbling block between British and Germans over the use of the term "European Parliament", with the British maintaining that it was an Assembly. Dick Gupwell, a pro-European Briton from the Socialist Group staff finally brokered a compromise by suggesting the terminology in the Treaty: "the Assembly of the European Community (European Parliament)". There was also widespread resistance to the word "manifesto". Manfred Michel, Secretary General at the beginning of the process, recalls that party Leaders came up with the idea of calling it a "platform". Ron Hayward, General Secretary of the Labour Party, had said on a visit to one of the meetings in 1978 that it was inevitable that an elected parliament would demand more power and that was one reason he was against direct elections.

The European manifesto failed to win support from the various parties, and was reduced to a 31-point "Political Declaration" by party Leaders of the Confed, with the names of Ian Mikardo MP and Hayward attached. These two had been sent to the Leaders' Summit in Brussels in June 1978 to sign the document. Labour was the only European Party not to send its Leader. To combat the press feeling that this was simply the lowest common denominator, a further document, the "Appeal to the European Electorate" was prepared for the Brussels Congress of the Confed immediately following the Leaders' meeting. This contained seven main aims, also fairly general in tone.

Labour's lack of enthusiasm for the European joint text came to a crunch when the NEC refused to endorse the final version of the "Appeal", necessitating a covering note by Hayward giving the official more negative slant. It was the only country not to use it as a platform. It was another decade before the Labour Party was fully to endorse an election manifesto of the European socialist parties. The Appeal was graced with a foreword from Hayward as party General Secretary, saying:

"This Declaration... is not a statement of party policy but is issued for information as an indication of our general approach. The Labour Party Manifesto for the Direct Elections, published in January 1979, sets out the policy upon which the British Labour Party will be fighting the campaign this summer."

It had been necessary to publish these documents in order to take advantage of the much-needed financial assistance from Brussels channelled via the Socialist Group.

Labour's own manifesto published simultaneously was also controversial, with Callaghan abstaining on the vote on its text at the NEC, after a lengthy debate on whether it should be called "Labour in Europe", "Labour for Europe" or "Labour and Europe". It said: "The EEC Assembly is not a real Parliament... Labour would vigorously resist any further extension of the powers of the Assembly" and aimed "to restore to the Commons the power to amend or repeal legislation applicable to Europe". The penultimate paragraph carried the sting:

"We declare that if the fundamental reforms contained in this manifesto are not achieved within a reasonable period of time, then the LP would have to consider very seriously whether continued EEC membership was in the best interests of the British people".

This was following a call for a major revision of the Treaty of Rome. Callaghan refused to launch the campaign and Hayward, the anti-marketeer, had to preside. Even the venue was subject to a last minute change due to double booking and many journalists arrived as it was ending. Nevertheless, the pro-marketeers argued that they could still sign up to this piece of party policy as the wording was sufficiently oblique.

In May Callaghan was due in Paris for a "Springtime for Socialists" rally attended by twenty thousand Europeans. It can't have been a happy meeting of minds. He warned the Leaders that each party must be free to pursue its own economic and political strategy. The Europeans had organized a series of eleven conferences and events between December and May in different countries and on topics covered by their campaign document. Two weeks before the election there was a final European socialist event at the foot of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, again without official participation of the British.

To campaign or not to campaign?

This was the election about which Tory Deputy Prime Minister Willie Whitelaw famously spoke of people going about the country stirring up apathy. There was little media publicity. Labour Party workers were dispirited and tired after the catastrophic general election a mere few weeks before and the devolution referenda in Scotland and Wales in the spring. All three manifestos of the main British parties called for reform of the CAP, leaving Labour candidates no unique selling point on which to campaign except the withdrawal policy. Complaints of lack of funding and poor organisation abounded. Conservatives did not campaign too hard for fear of awakening a dormant Labour vote. Their main advantage was that campaigning was held back until after the Whitsun break, effectively giving only two and a half weeks to win voters' hearts and minds.

Labour candidates had a meeting in Birmingham on 11-12 May financed by the European parties. There had also been a large candidates' meeting in Luxembourg in April with the socialist parties at which Willy Brandt had spoken to the Labour candidates trying to persuade them to take a more pro-European line. Castle made a barnstorming anti-market speech and Brandt as the next speaker tore up his prepared speech and refuted what she had said with a passionate off-the-cuff return. He spoke about international comrade-

ship and the need for European socialists to be together to combat the international capitalist movement. Brandt was a strong supporter of the social dimension of the EEC – the idea that the Community should concern itself not only with economic growth, but also with the living and working conditions of its citizens. This meeting revealed the unpreparedness of Labour's candidates. Most did not even know what their salaries would be. Barry Seal recalls that Tom Megahy took the wrong train to the airport and wanted the plane held, phoning the airport saying he was Leader of Kirklees Council. The plane left without him. A Labour official in the Commission who was also travelling that way helped him get to Brussels and he finally arrived in Luxembourg the next day just as the meeting was finishing. Seal says:

“None of us were used to getting planes then and I had trouble finding the money for the fare and had to do a deal with Co-op Travel [the travel agency used by many of the Labour MEPs] to be billed in arrears. Many of us were in the same boat as no-one was highly paid at the time.”

Many of the Labour Members attest to tales of local parties within their constituencies completely boycotting the elections and this undoubtedly affected turnout and the Labour result. Caborn, who had led the Yorkshire “Get Britain Out” campaign, said the North East Derbyshire party in his Euro-constituency refused to participate at all. Joyce Quin attributes a similar position to Jarrow (where Alan Donnelly, later a pro-European MEP and Leader of the EPLP, was constituency secretary and where Quin had defeated their local candidate, Michael Campbell, favourite to win the selection) although by election day they had started to participate. There were many more examples of this kind. The Militant effect precluded winning seats in Liverpool and Birmingham. Collins was told by Rotherglen, one of his constituencies, that they would boycott the election, although he says the MP much later became supportive. Speaking at conference in the autumn of 1979, a Lancashire candidate said “we couldn't make up our minds and so half-fought”. At the same conference Lomas spoke of a combination of indifference and hostility to the Common Market. (A more detailed account of these events can be found in *Britain's Emerging Euro-Elite?* (Westlake, 1994).)

Perhaps it was the demoralization and lack of coherence after the defeat of the Labour government, but it seemed the Labour Party could do nothing right. Millions of election leaflets were recalled, pulped and reprinted at vast expense because it was brought to the attention of the National Executive Committee by Dennis Skinner MP that the slogan on the leaflets read “Labour for Europe”. He took umbrage at this and the NEC agreed it had to be changed. The reprinted versions said “Labour and Europe” but some of the original versions were apparently distributed by several pro-market candidates. Terry Ashton, former London Regional Director, recalls that was the case in West London with pro-marketeer Jim Daly, a former GLC Councillor and its Chair of Transport. Daly did not win the seat and later defected to the SDP, unsuccessfully fighting a parliamentary seat under that banner. He had set up an organization (the Radical Centre for Democratic Studies) to keep the Brussels-based Roy Jenkins briefed on the UK political scene, possibly with a view to later defection.

In Putney, part of London South West constituency, the Labour candidate Tony Hart was an anti-marketeer, as were most of the constituency party

members at the time. There was not much of a campaign and to their annoyance the London South West election had to be re-run in the autumn because Shelagh Roberts (later Dame Shelagh), the Conservative winner and Greater London Councillor, had been disqualified on a technicality, not having resigned in a timely fashion from an office of the Crown (the Occupational Pensions Board). Mike Gapes, later a Labour MP, living in Putney at the time, recalls a lonely time touring the roads around tower blocks of the Alton Estate with a loud hailer in an attempt to drum up some voters. (Roberts was finally confirmed as Conservative Member for London South West in a by election in September 1979, though Labour increased its vote on a sharply reduced turnout, and the Conservative vote was halved.)

Because Britain votes on a Thursday and much of Europe at the weekend, the European election counts do not take place until Sunday. The suspense is awful for candidates, but the gap means that there is less excited interest by the press and party members, who do not bother to turn out in large numbers for the count. Enright, who had been a County Councillor, won the first seat to be declared and became the UK's first MEP. He was to be deselected by the next election by his local parties who objected to his pro-market stance.

Jan Royall worked in the European campaign office from January 1979, as did Michael Wood, a Labour Party member from the European Parliament who was General Secretary of the British Labour Group in the Assembly under John Prescott. (Royall later worked with Neil Kinnock and the European Commission and became Baroness Royall and Leader of the House of Lords). They remember that leaflets sent over to London during the campaign by the European Socialist Group were so out of touch with Labour's political position that they were quickly binned.

The lowest turnout in the country was in London North East, notorious for low turnouts, where Lomas, despite a strong majority of 24,804, had only 20.4% voting. Labour's safest seats were South East Wales (Rogers, majority 41,615), Yorkshire South (Key, majority 36,834), Glasgow (Buchan, majority 32,702) and Durham (Boyes, majority 28,804). Castle's Manchester seat had the seventh highest majority. Conservative victories were narrow in Strathclyde West and Midlands West, and Seal's Labour seat in Bradford was won on a far from comfortable majority, though he hung on to it until 1999.

An unrepentant Labour conference in autumn of 1979 carried Composite 40, saying (in part):

"The only way to remedy this situation is by carrying out the policy of radical reform set out in the Party's Manifesto for the Euro elections. Should changes not be made by the early 1980s the question of Britain's continued membership of the EEC should be reconsidered."

Castle, speaking in the debate, said "we have found things worse than we anticipated... dairy production is costing £250,000 per hour... We must use the European Assembly as a platform for our socialist policies... the Community must go socialist or we will come out." Lomas also managed to speak, reminding delegates of the withdrawal policy and that Labour should be in the EEC for only one term. He was finally to retire in 1999 after twenty years.

This, then, was the policy under which Labour's small band of MEPs were mandated to work.

Getting started

The British Labour Group (BLG) held its first meeting shortly after the election in Labour's Westminster headquarters, then at Transport House, with Tony Benn chairing and Prescott speaking as former Leader of the Labour delegation to the Assembly. Most members did not know each other, except for the pro-marketeters who had previously met in St Helens at a meeting chaired by Bill Rodgers MP and more informally earlier with Jim Cattermole. The pro-marketeters' plan was to put forward a slate for election of officers, comprising Collins as Deputy Leader, Gallagher as secretary and Enright as Leader. Originally the plan was for Leader and Chair to be one and the same. Allan Rogers saw that, given Castle's penchant for simply moving on if people did not agree with her, this would not work and he proposed separation, moving anti-market Caborn as Chair. This strategy threw the European Movement group off balance, as it was an unexpected proposal. When Castle was nominated as Leader she seemed an obvious choice as the only one with government experience, so Enright withdrew, leaving the right in some disarray. Seal was then nominated versus Collins as Deputy Leader and the voting was eight votes each with one abstention, the result remaining stubbornly the same through two re-runs. After a lunch adjournment where Quin appeared to have persuaded Adam that he would get on politically with Collins because he was in the European Movement, the vote shifted to 9 – 7 for Collins. The abstention throughout was Lomas who took the principled attitude of refusing to vote for people he did not know. Following her election as Leader Castle lost no time in persuading the General Secretary of the Labour Party that she should remain on Labour's NEC in an ex-officio capacity as Leader of the European Group.

The pre-1979 Labour group had use of a parliamentary office courtesy of its Leader, Prescott, in St Stephen's House, on the Embankment where Wood and Royall worked. This was the venue for a second BLG meeting after the election to decide on committees which they did by ballot. In the autumn of 1979 the European Parliament Information Office in London was in the throes of moving from its old base in Kensington Palace Road to an elegant building in Queen Anne's Gate, SW1, rather handier to the political hub. Since the parliament option was no longer available as MEPs were not now MPs, Caborn, together with Barbara Castle's assistant Janet Anderson negotiated space there for the political groups. Castle took office in a fine room on the first floor looking out over St James's Park and installed Anderson and Royall. She tenaciously managed to hold on to an office space in that building until July 1986, a full year after she had been deposed as BLG Leader. Anderson later followed another Castle assistant Jack Straw and became an MP, for Rossendale and Darwen, from 1992 and Minister for Tourism 1998-2001. When Anderson left in the Spring of 1980 to work for Jack Straw, Anita Pollack, who had been working for an MP, was recruited.

The Brits hit town

The BLG formed one sixth of the 112-strong Socialist Group, the largest political grouping in the European Parliament of nine nations. Roy Jenkins, then President of the Commission, referred to "an unbalanced result" in the

UK. Claude Cheysson, the French Socialist Commissioner, was more scathingly outspoken, being quoted in the *Times Guide to 1979 European Election* as saying: “the Labour Party has made a ridiculously low effort that is going to reduce the Socialist Group in the European Parliament.” Whilst some of the Socialist Group’s Members were critical of the EEC, no other member party had a withdrawal policy except that of Finn L ynge, representing Greenland, from 1979 an internally self-governing part of the Kingdom of Denmark. (Greenland ultimately left the Community as the result of a local referendum in February 1982.) At the first meeting of the Socialist Group the position of Leader was contested between Ernest Glinne from Belgium’s Socialist Party and Ludwig Fellermaier from Germany’s SPD. Both of these had been MEPs in the Assembly. Barbara Castle persuaded her BLG colleagues to vote for Glinne because she told them he was the more left-wing of the two, probably relying on her experience of European Assembly visits with her husband Ted.

Members of the Socialist Group were disappointed that Labour had not won more seats, and a little suspicious of these vociferous anti-Europeans, who appeared to be less conciliatory than their predecessors in the Assembly. For the most part, however, they accepted their new British comrades as part of the family. Labour Members were somewhat uneasy. They did not know how long they would be working in the EEC. Many felt that the next general election would be won by Labour and they would not serve a second term because a Labour government would withdraw. It was not to be. The Conservatives were in government for the long haul.

There was also some bad blood between the Labour Party officialdom in the UK and the Socialist Group. The NEC unrealistically wanted funding for researchers that was part of the Socialist Group’s institutional funding to be remitted to Labour headquarters to help pay for its staff, since it was always strapped for cash. Grumbling about this rumbled on for some time. Eric Heffer when Chair of the NEC proposed that the British staff of the Socialist Group should actually work for the Labour Party, blithely indifferent to the fact that this would never be permitted under the Parliament’s rules. NEC endorsement of candidates had depended on a written undertaking “to adhere to support for the party manifesto and to vote for the payment of any sums of money made available for research or administrative purposes to the British Labour Assemblymen or women collectively to the Labour Party which would employ staff for this purpose”.

Northern Ireland’s SDLP member, John Hume, was deemed by the Socialist Group to be nominally a member of the BLG making it large enough to qualify for delegation status. Although he did not attend their meetings, he was counted as part of their quota for posts under the Parliament’s complicated D’Hondt system – a proportional system of allocation based on the numerical strengths of political groups, named after the Belgian lawyer who devised it. In later years he was to say that all the parliamentary positions gained by BLG members were attributable to his joining the delegation. He was also part of their social group. Hume and the Reverend Ian Paisley were also Westminster MPs and maintained dual mandates during their terms in the European Parliament

The Conservatives remained fairly aloof, forming the European Democratic Group with two Danes and a UUP Member. This was because

some of their Members, although pro-European, were put off by the more federalist rhetoric of some of the Christian Democrats. Dropping the name “Conservative” was the subject of some debate, particularly after their spectacular victory, but felt to be necessary in the European context where the word was not included in the names of political parties or well understood. They were led by Sir James Scott-Hopkins, a former MP and Assembly Member, and were the largest single national group in the Parliament. It was not until the Spanish joined in 1986 that their group was to become more multinational, since they failed to attract any of the Greeks who arrived in 1982. One of their number, Baroness Elles, coming from a long career in local government, became a Vice-President of the Parliament in 1982 and used the post to great effect to put down Labour Members in plenary sessions. Sir Henry Plumb (often called “Sir Plumb”), later Lord Plumb, having been President of the National Farmers’ Union in the UK, gained the post of Chairman of the Agriculture Committee. This was not without some angst from the French who were against reform of the CAP and did not like to see such an experienced opponent in a strong position. The Agriculture Committee included five former national presidents of farmers’ unions. Some of the Conservatives were instrumental later in forming the Kangaroo Group, dedicated to removing barriers to trade and developing the Single Market. Plumb was to take over the leadership of their group before the next election.

Winnie Ewing, SNP Member for the Highlands and Islands, having lost her House of Commons seat in May, was quick to point out that she had a high turnout at 55%, with a constituency larger in area than Belgium. As an MP she had already served on the UK delegation to the Assembly and was to remain active in the Parliament for a good number of years, becoming known as a good speechmaker.

The Socialist Group operated fairly chaotically, as did the Parliament itself, both finding the transition from the previous smaller institution less than smooth. Glinne, the new Chairman, likened the job to chairing a kindergarten. Most of the Members did not know each other and it took a while to settle down. The Group in the former Assembly had been fairly cohesive, despite some policy differences, but it was smaller and more amicable. Manfred Michel, Secretary General of the Group until the end of 1980, said that in the pre-1979 Assembly Labour played a constructive role and the comradeship was excellent, despite their divided views on the Common Market. On one occasion he had taken them to his home in Luxembourg for a social evening, but such efforts had no effect on softening the anti-market policy of the party and things were different in the new, larger system.

Immediately upon arrival the Labour Leader was thrown into complex negotiations as to who would be endowed with what post in the Parliament, with the help of Michel who was experienced in working the machinery to best advantage. The BLG won entitlement to one Parliament Vice-Chair, which went to Allan Rogers as one of the Group’s senior anti-marketeters. He said Enright’s name had first been mooted but this did not find favour with the Group and it took him by surprise when his own name came up. It soon became apparent that one chair of committee post was also available. The Labour Members had, after a certain amount of jostling including a toss of a coin, agreed which committee they desired. Collins was startled to be

called up on his holiday by David Blackman, a senior British member of the Socialist Group staff, to say he had been given Chair of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection as a result of Castle's negotiating. He was never to look back from this beginning, holding the post for the majority of his twenty years in the Parliament – save for 1984–89 during which he was the Socialist Group's Coordinator (spokesperson), when the German Socialist Beate Weber held the post. Under Collins' leadership the Environment Committee became a powerful and forward-looking force, constantly pushing the powers of the Parliament, holding the Commission accountable and negotiating policies with the Council of Ministers. But at the beginning such positions were rare for the reluctant BLG Members. The only other trophy was for Seal as Vice-Chair of the REX Committee, covering external trade.

Castle railed against the "backstairs negotiations" that were the result of the proportional representation system. She hated the d'Hondt system and argued that the Socialist Group, as the largest, should put forward its own candidate as President of the Parliament. As she later put it in her autobiography: "To Ernest Glinne, wheeler dealing was a way of life because of the way Belgian politics worked" (Castle, 1993). She accompanied him in the negotiations, as senior Vice-Chair of the Socialist Group and he was somewhat discomfited by her disapproval of the system. She impulsively called a press conference with Glinne on the lawn outside the Parliament (not being able to obtain a room), to lodge a protest against the election of Simone Veil (French Liberal) as President on party lines. Castle argued that the President should be more like the Speaker of the House of Commons. This was rather obscure to a lot of the foreign journalists who were not familiar with the concept and it offered a slightly sour note, since Veil was accorded cross-party respect as an Auschwitz survivor. The complaints boiled down to a protest against the thirty-month term of office that had been agreed by the political groups. There was some suspicion that President Giscard d'Estaing's influence had been at work in the high level of support for Veil. However the deal finally struck was for Veil to be President for two-and-a-half years, then for it to be the turn of a Socialist. This so-called gentlemen's agreement was to come unstuck when the half way point came round at the end of 1981 and, partly as a result of Conservative machinations, it took several rounds of balloting for the Socialist candidate to be elected.

Castle's modest effort was not the only political demonstration at the first session. The Liberals staged their own protest with prominent British Liberals, including Russell Johnston and Christopher Mayhew, neither of whom had been elected. They occupied ten seats in the hemicycle at a point when it was empty and called a press conference to highlight the size of their vote in Britain with no members resulting, and to argue for a uniform election procedure. The European Liberals invited Russell Johnston, who had been a MEP from 1973–79, to attend their group meetings and have some access to the parliamentary buildings.

UK Members were the third lowest paid in the Parliament, earning less than many officials, whilst their German colleagues were the highest paid. This was the result of a prior agreement that had taken quite some negotiating, that MEPs would be paid the same as national MPs. When the MEPs

arrived they did not know how much they could claim on expenses for their travel, and this was not settled until the first plenary. Rogers, who worked well with President Veil, says they set in train the first of the expenses reforms. Originally mileage was paid from national capitals and this rather generous system led to gravy train accusations. In the early days the mileage system of expenses also operated if a Member had to return to their own country for a mid-week engagement, which meant it was possible to make a substantial profit; it was also permitted to have allowances paid into a range of different currencies, thus benefiting from currency speculation. Many other nationalities also enjoyed good pension provisions and this, too, was not the case for the UK. In due course a voluntary pension scheme was set up for all those who wished to join, enthusiastically supported by the British but less so by the Dutch and Germans.

The Labour Group quickly polarised into two main camps, with some Members caught in the middle. The early pro-marketeters comprised Collins, Enright, Griffiths, Key and Quin, soon joined by Adam after a certain amount of teasing about his membership of the Labour Common Market Safeguards Campaign (which he maintained was for information purposes). Adam says that he always felt Europe should be taken seriously.

Gallagher, also a pro-European, remained throughout his term rather semi-detached from the Labour Group, though he had attended a pre-election meeting of the pro-marketeters as a member of the Labour Committee for Europe. When he later left the party he said the BLG was “really two groups of people who don’t see eye to eye on anything”. He had earlier worked in the same mine as Ken Coates (Bilsthorpe colliery). Later Coates was his lecturer at university, and then his agent when he fought against Ken Clarke at Rushcliffe in the election of 1974. Gallagher was sponsored by the NUM although he was a self-confessed moderate and against the miners’ strike when it occurred, believing that Scargill should have agreed to attempts to deal with overstaffing in above-ground jobs. He says that when he was leader of Nottingham Council he had been passed a document, “Topic 12”, outlining which pits were to be closed in the next twenty years and he ensured it was passed to Scargill, possibly adding to the momentum for the miners’ strike. He later supported the breakaway Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM), based in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, which drew criticism from some other members of the BLG. The refusal of the Nottinghamshire miners to join the strike in March 1984, claiming it was unconstitutional, was to lead to the violent picketing and allegations of strike breaking that took place during that year. Gallagher spent most of his social time with what he felt were more convivial Irish Members, supporting their pro-European and good social welfare stance (and said they referred to the Tories as cave men). He was eventually to defect to the SDP when he was under threat of deselection by his constituency party in the run-up to the 1984 election.

Gallagher became a first Vice-Chairman of the Energy and Research Committee and was challenged by Adam when he defected, but maintained that he still kept his place in the Socialist Group and was in post under their quota and as such not beholden to the BLG. Gallagher many years later said that after he was elected he regretted giving up Nottingham Council for Europe, where he found everything was very slow, whereas “in local gov-

ernment you could see a result every day.” His defection to the SDP was not entirely happy as he was not at all in favour of the European Liberals nor a supporter of Shirley Williams. In 1987 he set up a moderate Labour Party in Mansfield and by that time was associated with the UDM. He says “now the whole Labour Party is moderate” and rejoined the party in the early 1990s.

The anti-marketeers, largely Tribunites, formed a group of six: Balfe, Buchan, Caborn, Lomas, Megahy and Seal. Barbara Castle as Leader, whilst also firmly anti-market, saw it as her duty to keep aloof from internal factions. In the middle were Clwyd, Boyes and Rogers, still largely on the left, and fairly anti-market, but over time some shifted their position, as did Balfe and even Castle. Rogers remained a Eurosceptic and in favour of pulling out on the grounds that Britain was a net importer from Europe and that it would not harm the economy. He preferred to deal with the Commonwealth, but in the BLG saw himself as trying to bridge the gap between the Members and so did not join the anti-market faction. By the end of this parliamentary session there was a two-to-one majority in the BLG to stay in the EEC.

Working partners

The Socialist Group included quite a few Members who had been in the Parliamentary Assembly prior to June 1979, and many had national parliamentary experience. There were some interesting and eminent characters amongst Labour’s new group of comrades.

In the European Parliament and the Socialist Group, Members sit alphabetically rather than in national delegations. This meant that firm anti-marketeers Buchan and Caborn found themselves seated near Willy Brandt, the charismatic former German Chancellor. Whilst there was obvious disagreement on the merits of membership of the EEC, the comrades found other points of mutual interest. Buchan, a formidable Glaswegian with a life-long and vibrant interest in working class culture, poetry and folk music, recalls that Brandt had an excellent singing voice. Caborn, a doughty shop steward from the steel industry in Sheffield and later a long-serving Minister in the Blair government, and whose father had been District Secretary of the AEU and a Communist Party member, found a common interest in the economic situation and trades unions. It was not long after there had been a debate on the Brandt report at Cancun and development issues were high on the British agenda. Economic confrontation was on the rise in the UK and the debate on access to information for workers in multinational companies was in full swing. Francois Mitterrand was a member of the Socialist Group after the election, but immediately resigned, devoting himself to his presidential campaign in France. British Members always found it a strange practice that some continental parties would put well-known figures at the top of their party lists for campaigning purposes and then they would resign and be replaced by those lower on the list, but this was a common occurrence.

Leading the Socialist Group was Ernest Glinne, a Belgian Socialist former MP and Minister for Employment and Labour, who had also been a member of the Parliamentary Assembly and Chair of its Economic and Monetary Committee. Jacques Delors, a French Socialist of whom much more was to be seen later, became Chair of the Economic and Monetary Committee from

1979-81. Carlo Ripa di Meana, an Italian who was later to become Commissioner for Environment was there, as was Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, later a long serving Minister in German governments. Others included Rudi Arndt, a writer and former SPD Minister who was also in the earlier Assembly; Katherina Focke, a former German Federal Minister; Edith Cresson, in 1981 to become French Minister for Agriculture, then Prime Minister and later a Commissioner; and Erwin Lange, Chair of Budgets since 1975 in the former Assembly, a long time SPD Bundestag member who had suffered imprisonment under the Nazis. There was also Karel van Miert, Vice-President of the Confederation of Socialist Parties from 1978-80 and later a Belgian Commissioner; Bettino Craxi, national Italian Socialist Party secretary and former MP; Jiri Pelikan, a former Czech member of the "Prague Spring" movement standing as an Italian Socialist; and many others. The Group also included a member from Greenland, Finn Lynge, who said it took him three days to travel to meetings and ostentatiously wore seal-skin waistcoats to the annoyance of the animal lovers.

There were numerous high-flyers from other parties too, including Altiero Spinelli, subsequently to found the federalist Crocodile Club within the Parliament, who had been elected on the Italian Communist list, having been a European Commissioner until 1976. Other notables and nobles included Otto Habsburg; Philipp von Bismarck; Martin Bangemann, a German Liberal later to be a Commissioner; Enrico Berlinguer, the Italian Communist leader; Emma Bonino, an Italian Radical later to be a Commissioner; Polish Prince Michel Poniatowski, as a Member for France who became the influential Chair of the Energy and Research Committee; and Prince Casimir Zu Sayn Wittgenstein Berleburg from Germany. Jacques Santer, later to become the ill-fated President of the Commission, was also elected as a MEP, but quickly resigned to join a new Luxembourg government. There were ten former heads of state and government: Willy de Clerq and Leo Tindemans from Belgium, Willy Brandt from Germany, Gaston Thorn from Luxembourg, Pierre Pflimlin, Jacques Chirac, Edgar Faure, Pierre Messmer and Michel Debre from France, Emilio Colombo, Giulio Andreotti and Mariano Rumor of Italy.

Despite their differences, Labour Members found much common cause with their Socialist colleagues. This was the heyday of the peace movement and campaigns for nuclear disarmament. American Cruise missiles were being deployed in Europe and the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp was soon to be set up. There was agreement on a policy against nuclear weapons and many joint campaigns on these issues. A large number of Labour Members were at that time members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Unemployment, workers' rights, social welfare and human rights were also largely uncontroversial matters across the Group where many Members had trade union roots. In contrast to Castle's combative style, many of those Labour Members who had been involved in local and county authorities had a clearer idea as to how the politics of compromise worked and were sometimes more willing to negotiate with others. All was not entirely peaceful, however, since Castle managed to tread on the toes of the German delegation led by Arndt and relations between the two delegations were often in conflict.

Getting down to work

This world's first multinational Parliament elected by direct suffrage representing 260 million voters in nine Member States elected former French Minister of Health and concentration camp inmate Simone Veil as its President with "founding father" Robert Schuman present in the gallery. (Jean Monnet had died earlier that year.) Setting the standard for years to come, this momentous event was largely ignored in the British press. As remains the case today, there was simultaneous interpretation into all the languages. Because the term of office of President was not laid down in the rules, the centre and right parties got together and proposed a two-and-a-half year term. Glinne for the Socialists proposed that it should be based on the Speaker of the House of Commons system, and that it should go to the largest group, obviously put up to it by Castle. The proposal was greeted with laughter.

Parliament's first five years were dominated by inter-institutional struggles over on-going budget crises. Once the elections to parliamentary posts had taken place, business took over from the posturing. Immediately Members were thrust into dealing with real issues in committees rather than simply pro and anti arguments. The work was a continuation from the old Parliament, with most of the procedures remaining intact, inefficient though they sometimes proved to be. During this Parliament the Christian Democrat and Liberal groups succeeded in dominating the votes because they found much common cause, often thwarting the Socialists despite the fact that the latter were the largest group.

The opening scenes of what was to be a lengthy budget battle took place with Balfe, as a Budget Committee member, putting the BLG position and unsurprisingly wanting the budget reduced. He spoke of "people in Bermondsey and Deptford [his constituency] having to go without a Sunday joint whilst in their midst is an EEC intervention store packed with red meat". He also paid tribute to his predecessor on budgets, Labour's Lord Bruce, in the tradition of House of Commons maiden speeches. Robert Jackson, the Conservative budget spokesman, who as early as September was seeking more powers for the Parliament, launched an attack on Labour by saying that Balfe had "brought out very clearly the radical flaw in the whole approach of his party to the question of Europe: full of criticisms of the Community but determined that we in this House should not have any power to do anything about them".

Brandt's speech on the next Helsinki follow-up conference on security and co-operation was an inspirational beginning. He spoke about hunger in the world, energy policy and trades unions and of constructing a treaty with Yugoslavia and on a European Community Charter of Human Rights. He also said: "Strasbourg is where the heart of Europe is beating. This city is living testimony to the reconciliation and subsequent friendship that has been forged between the German and French peoples, and which has brought progress to the whole of Europe and not just to our two peoples."

There was plenty of procedural tussling and adjournments as well as substantial business in that very first session in Strasbourg. The Irish President of the Council, Jack Lynch, drew a protest from Reverend Ian Paisley by beginning his speech in Irish. This was the first of many colourful interjec-

tions over the years from Paisley, who also complained that the Union flag was being flown upside down. Paisley, according to journalist John Palmer, shouting amongst other things: “Jack Lynch you are a murderer – you have blood on your hands” was removed by the ushers after “prolonged and vigorous protests”. Lynch responded by saying “Madame President, I had hoped that the Member for Northern Ireland would not mar the historic opening of this newly-elected European Parliament by introducing a note of acrimony, particularly so early in the session”. Roy Jenkins as President of the Commission (having left the House of Commons in 1977 after Callaghan refused him the Foreign Office) spoke about the energy crisis. The Thursday debates lasted until 4.05 am after endless adjournments, none long enough for dinner, to much grumbling from Castle. There was a break from 1.50 am to 3.30 am for some amendments to be printed where she managed a catnap in her office. The Friday sitting, still with the budget debate in full swing, did not close until 6.30 pm. Many of the Members must have missed their planes and crawled home utterly exhausted and not a little frustrated.

Derek Enright wrote the following in his “Our Man in Europe” bulletin to his party members:

“In June it all sounded very romantic going to Luxembourg for the Socialist Group meeting, then Strasbourg for the first directly elected European Parliamentary Assembly. By the end of July I wondered why I had left security and the imminent prospect of an exciting headship, sharing each day with my family in a settled existence, for a nomadic life amid people who did not know how to conduct business in a proper fashion.

It was well illustrated late one evening by the interpreters. My translation headphones were switched on to them when one of our British politicians came in heatedly, after an Italian whose excited gestures did not match the cool translation on the earphones.

From our translation box, in addition to this MEP’s impassioned speech, we heard from the interpreter, ‘Oh... he’s going over the same...ground again! I’m fed up of this...job, I want something to eat and get home to sleep.’ The moment was further enlivened by another MEP asking: ‘Is the British translation I heard on the headphones correct?’

But September came, the committee work started and I remembered my aims and beliefs – a strong feeling for the Third World... The full Parliament had a seven-hour debate on how to tackle this problem.”

Castle found the European Parliament a strange institution, not at all like the House of Commons where she had been for over thirty years. She and other British Members enjoyed and fully exploited Question Time which became widely popular as a form of participatory sport. It was, however, a pale imitation of what she felt was the real thing (i.e. the House of Commons) and she never understood why the Commission treated questions in a cavalier fashion, preferring not to give straight answers to anything at all. Her personal assistant at the beginning, Janet Anderson, said they were surprised at first at the reduced amount of constituency casework that arrived and that most of it came from businesses.

As a former government Minister for many years, Castle was not used to having to look after herself, deal with different currencies and work in disorganized conditions. Her autobiography (Castle, 1993) records:

“Used as I was to the austere and regulated life of the House of Commons, my arrival in Europe in 1979 was a culture shock. Brussels is a fine city and we British Members... soon discovered the delights of its many restaurants... But as far as I was concerned these delicacies [lobster, mussels etc] were not enough to offset the frustrations I felt as someone who had come to do a serious parliamentary job. In those early days the facilities provided for us MEPs was laughably inadequate. We were the Cinderellas all right. While the Commission dominated Brussels with its great sprawling mass of glass and concrete at the Berlaymont, we MEPs were corralled in some makeshift cramped quarters in the Boulevard de l’Empereur a couple of miles away, where we had not even a locker for whatever Parliamentary papers we were able to lay out hands on, let alone a desk. This was all the more annoying when I was elected Leader of the British Labour Group and I wanted to keep on top of things. I spent my first year in impotent fury trying to find out what was going on.....”

However it was not too many months before MEPs were in much closer offices, albeit rather cramped together, at 97 Rue Belliard, in what is now the office of the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions in a substantial European *quartier*. It was not until the second term that they had individual offices in Brussels. In Strasbourg they occupied offices in the building used by the Council of Europe, and this, with new additions added from time to time as the Parliament expanded, served the MEPs right up until a new Parliament building was built and opened in 1999.

Because Strasbourg has never been well served by international flights, the French government for some years laid on “special” Air France flights for Members from some of the major European capitals, to facilitate the monthly journey to Strasbourg. These only functioned on the Monday, Thursday and Friday of plenary session weeks. The travel was always fraught with difficulty. Timings of flights were rarely convenient, connections were missed due to delays and parliamentary sessions frequently heard laments from Members about their travel problems. Lord Plumb recalls that for his very first Strasbourg session, his connecting flight from Birmingham was late, he missed the “special” and had to wait hours for another plane, which touched down en route in Lille, adding to the delay. This was not at all unusual. Hours were often spent in airport lounges waiting out delays, sometimes from strikes or fog. Many had to make several connections to get to Strasbourg, or fly into Frankfurt or Basle, each necessitating a two hour car journey from the airport. This difficult journey is still the situation today, since the Council of Ministers has refused to agree a single place of work.

By September, the first session after the short summer recess, Labour Members were already energetically tabling questions on coal policy, agricultural expenditure and budgetary contributions, misuse of Community funds and fraud, butter export subsidies, sugar surpluses, qualifications of veterinary personnel, energy, and fisheries. They were beginning to make their mark on what would become their long-term campaigning issues. Of the nine Oral Questions without debate tabled on Monday 24 September, for instance, Castle was involved in four and Brian Key in one. The Tories were in the ascendant on Oral Questions with debate (their experience showing here as these were more important), being involved in sponsoring five of the sixteen

questions tabled, Labour only two. All of this was their initiative, instructions from “home” being non-existent.

Leading the attack for Labour, Castle pulled no punches against the British Conservatives. With a Conservative question on Community armaments procurement on the agenda, Castle accused Scott-Hopkins of trying to silence them because:

“the Tories are deeply implicated in an attempt to turn this Community into a defence organization... We in the British Labour Group do not believe that the problem of unemployment in Europe can be solved by setting up an industrial-military complex and then telling the workers of Europe that their jobs depend on an arms race”.

This was not her only attack on the Conservatives that session. She weighed in on butter prices, particularly the 50p a pound export subsidies and accused the Conservative Minister of Agriculture of selling out the interest of the British consumer in agreeing to the last price increase in the Council of Agriculture Ministers. At the same time she attacked Conservative MEP Neil Balfour on butter surpluses going to the Soviet Union, saying “what he was trying to do was bring a serious agriculture problem into the heart of the Cold-War philosophy of the British Conservatives!”

Michael Gallagher made his first of very few public interventions in five years, speaking on coal stockpiles and energy policy and cheap coal imports from South Africa, and opposing a nuclear programme. The next time he would speak in the chamber it was to be as a member of the SDP in the run-up to the 1984 election.

Socialist Group colleagues were astonished at the British Members’ combative parliamentary style, which was very different from the more restrained approach they were used to. “They did not like our adversarial politics and thought it was insulting to other Members” says Caborn. One of the senior German SPD members said “you are not in your own Parliament now”, in response to Labour’s rough and tumble attacks. It was a slow cultural learning curve for the comrades.

An early attempt to set up a women’s rights committee was opposed by British Conservatives, particularly Lady Elles, and withdrawn at the first session. A successful bid was made in October to set up a special Committee of Inquiry into the Situation of Women in Europe, which evolved into a permanent Committee on Women’s Rights after the 1984 election.

As Barbara Castle was starting to get into her stride in her mission to reform the CAP and budget, she was dealt a blow. Her beloved husband Ted died on Boxing Day 1979 during family celebrations at home. She was touched by the warm support of colleagues. Griffiths and Rogers drove all the way from Wales to the funeral. Plumb sent a supporting note, as did people from many quarters. She had lost a strong supporter and friend. When Barbara next met Sir Henry back in the Parliament, she told him “the old bugger promised not to die before me”. BLG Members rallied round for months on her return, accompanying her to dinner in her favourite restaurants.

By March, she was back on form again making speeches demanding agriculture reforms. She was starting to work out the line that she was to pursue for some years, that is to stop “open ended commitment to buy up all the milk the farmers can produce... we believe prices should be reduced and support

the smallest non-viable farms for social reasons through direct aids." Unfortunately most of her continental colleagues felt this would be a re-nationalisation of the CAP. Castle was furious that the Agriculture Committee (scandalously packed with farmers) sometimes voted increases in farm prices that were even higher than those proposed by the Commission. She established a good working relationship with Finn Gundelach, the Danish Agriculture Commissioner, who supported moves for reform, but sadly, it was not too long before he died and his successor Poul Dalsager was not quite as zealous in his attitude to reforms as she hoped. The reform battle continued for long years, running from crisis to crisis. In 1982 an increase of 3% was agreed despite the Community budget being bankrupt and this led to yet another budget crisis.

Priestley led a staff strike at the commencement of the March plenary session, brought about by a decision to hold all sessions henceforth in Strasbourg. There was strong support for Luxembourg from that quarter, as many of the staff were based there and some sessions continued to be held there for a time.

Despite Labour's anti-market approach its MEPs were good attenders and became fully engaged in the work. They were always active in the hemicycle during plenary sessions, most even staying on for the Fridays, generally without Castle who soon preferred to go home on Thursday nights as she was constantly in demand for speaking engagements. They also were assiduous in their committee work. Lord Plumb, who was then Chair of the Agriculture Committee, tells of the formidable line-up of Barbara Castle, Joyce Quin and Edith Cresson (soon to be Agriculture Minister in Mitterrand's government) in the front row of his committee, where the first part of the meeting was always a fuss about whether or not Castle had her papers. She did not normally take an assistant to Brussels for meetings and after years of having everything done for her as a government Minister, often struggled with organizational matters. He says "she was a fighter, but she was a sweetie". Castle's combative nature was often goaded to fury by Plumb's emollient approach. This was the time of rising production leading to huge food mountains and escalating CAP costs culminating in the ridiculous situation for some years of butter and beef being distributed free at Christmas to charities simply to help reduce the storage and export restitution costs. Every Agriculture Committee meeting was concerned with debates on how to deal with the surpluses for sugar, butter and milk.

Roland Boyes developed a reputation for dry wit and rumbustious interventions that followed him into the House of Commons. He relished attacking the Tories, and made his mark early on. In January 1980 he said "it grieves me a little to hear the hypocrites across the floor talking about unemployment, when their government in Westminster is cynically and deliberately creating it."

Budget battles and the UK rebate

Arguments about the size of Britain's contributions had been around since Harold Wilson's attempts to renegotiate terms of entry for Britain. It had been clear then that Britain would have a substantial budget deficit in its contribution to the EEC. This was also the case for Germany, but there was a tacit

understanding that their economy was strong and did well on export trade which made up for their heavy contribution. Back in 1973 it was felt that Britain would also gain in this way as a form of compensation, but Britain was being overtaken in productivity and competitiveness and its industrial strength was falling. By 1980 big industry in the UK, particularly steel, was being hit by the world recession and unemployment was rapidly rising. This brought the matter of the British contribution to the fore once more.

The Labour government of 1974 had negotiated a “Corrective Mechanism” on British contributions to the EC budget, but it had not solved the problems that were coming to a head as the transitional arrangements for EC membership came to their end. Britain was the second largest contributor after Germany, but one of the poorest Member States. The status quo could not continue and Margaret Thatcher was hell-bent on getting a better deal, seeking a broad balance between Britain’s receipts and contributions. Her efforts were to put Labour Members in something of a quandary. They hated supporting her, but could not oppose attempts to improve the unhappy budgetary situation for Britain. Labour’s NEC set up a study of the alternatives to EC membership.

In October 1979 Castle was complaining that the projected £1,000 million British contribution for 1980 was the equivalent of a 3p in the pound tax rate. In a November debate she said: “We heard a lot... about... *juste retour* ... is this an unjust *retour*? Poorer nations subsidising the rich ones. I offer this solidarity to Margaret Thatcher: for heaven’s sake stand firm, and I will back you up”. It is not recorded what Thatcher thought of this piece of uninvited solidarity.

By the time of the Dublin Summit at the end of 1979 a major row over the 1980 budget was gathering momentum, the main problem being that agriculture spending was getting out of control. CAP reform was something on which Labour MEPs had a clear mandate to get involved. Agriculture was taking around 78% of the total budget. Increases in milk prices alone were in danger of pushing spending through the permitted resources ceiling. Every 1% increase in milk prices added 100 million European Units of Account to the budget and clearly this was untenable. The first parliamentary reading on the budget achieved some limited modifications to reduce spending on milk, but Castle and others tried without success to put a check on open-ended commitments to agricultural spending. At home the *Daily Express* said that the CAP added 12% to the cost of food. Although the Conservatives would table amendments to reduce agricultural spending Castle accused them of supporting only token reductions.

A more comprehensive account of this first budget battle can be found in Sir Julian Priestley’s *Six Battles that Shaped Europe’s Parliament* (Priestley, 2008), where he describes the European players (particularly Erwin Lange, chair of the Budget Committee and Piet Dankert the rapporteur – both Socialists), the process by which the rejection was developed and its impact on the reputation of the Parliament. Parliament had gained substantial powers over the non-compulsory part of the budget in 1977 and a Qualified Majority in the Council of Ministers was needed to reject Parliament’s position at that time. That meant that if two large and one small country had not opposed the amendments the whole budgetary reform process might have started, but at the lengthy Council meeting the UK government went with

the majority and threw away the chance of more CAP reform at that moment. At the Dublin Summit Thatcher unsuccessfully sought a permanent solution to Britain's inequitable contribution and this was where the British negotiators focused their main attention.

Finally in December, after lengthy and unsatisfactory negotiations with a Council that did not appear to realize how serious the situation was, Parliament, including the Labour Members, rejected the budget by a substantial majority (288 – 64). This threw the Community into an unprecedented situation which resulted in a financial mechanism coming into place known as “provisional twelfths” - a monthly limit on spending at the level of the previous year's budget. The crisis thus precipitated could be seen as something of an own goal, however, since the Council was under no pressure to rectify the situation speedily. Provisional twelfths meant that Parliament was operating on an inadequate budget designed for the old Assembly of 198 members rather than the new one of 410, lower travel expenses and fewer staff. It was to be September 1980 before this particular problem was resolved, with a cobbled-together solution. The delay meant, amongst the more obvious constrictions, that allowances and salaries were frozen and there was a block on new staff being recruited, including interpreters.

In March 1980 Castle argued against the Socialist Group but with the support of the Conservatives in favour of a super tax as an instrument to close the open-ended commitment to buy surplus milk products. Her amendments argued for a 1% decrease in price overall, but did not win majority support.

When Parliament voted in favour of the budget in June 1980, after the Council had agreed slightly more moderate farm price increases, the BLG remained opposed to it. Indeed they put forward a Motion to reject the budget again, which was comprehensively voted down on 9 July by 171 – 22 with 9 abstentions. This time they were against the more pragmatic position of the Socialist Group who thought it was the best deal possible at the time, particularly as some increases had been made in the regional fund and there was an agreement to carry out a review of the budget as a whole in time for 1982. The BLG was still critical, on the grounds of the budget's many flaws and in particular the failure realistically to tackle agriculture spending. On the one hand the Group shared the view that the overspending had to stop. On the other, it was clear that many of the Socialist Group and the active Conservatives on the Budget Committee were keen to build up the reputation and power of the Parliament. Labour did not support that at all, particularly outspoken being Megahy. Not for the last time there was a moral dilemma. It was the start of eight consecutive years in which the Labour Members voted to reject budgets.

Whilst the general line of Labour and the Socialist Group was for spending reductions, some of the BLG were also working to restore cuts in social and regional spends. In December 1980 Win Griffiths supported a proposal to set up a European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Assembly in 1977 having allocated funding to an embryonic regional fund. Parliament's demand for the EDF (European Development Fund – spending on development aid – not the same as ERDF) to be “budgetised”, i.e. placed under the powers of the Parliament, was ignored and to this day remains an unresolved battle.

The Dublin Summit in December that year debated an adjustment to the financial mechanism but it was not settled until the Fontainebleau Summit

in May 1980 by means of “special measures”. Stephen Wall, later the UK Permanent Representative (Wall, 2008), says that a three-year deal for Britain had been negotiated by Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington and Ian Gilmour, his deputy. Thatcher was less than thrilled with their negotiation and it did not hold, taking another three years of battles before a long-term solution was agreed. To some extent the Council was spooked by Parliament’s earlier rejection of the budget and there was concern that the same fate might befall the rebate. Council came up with a way of paying the temporary refund under a different mechanism (using unanimous decision) so as to avoid the possibility of rejection. The Parliament in future would have to confine its intervention to complaining about the substantive content of the relevant Regulation. It was not greeted with great enthusiasm by the European colleagues. Dankert, the Socialist Group budget spokesman, said “the British agreement has shown that the policy of blackmailing the Community works” and that “the British deal means that the Community will hit the own resources ceiling a year earlier than we expected.”

Nevertheless Castle was quick to condemn the delay at Dublin: “seldom have I read a more superficial document... inability of the Community to reform itself”. She taunted Thatcher for backing down on a deal worth £350 million as “willing to nag, but afraid to fight.” Derek Prag counter-attacked for the Conservatives accusing her of “the usual dose of repetitious clap trap”. In the debate on the BLG motion to reject the budget in July 1980 Labour was becoming aware that the rebate would be put to use to reduce the UK’s public sector borrowing requirement and not for regional development and were furious about this state of affairs. The rebate settled at Fontainebleau was £550 million, so by holding out in December Thatcher had managed to increase its value by £200 million.

Castle was mistrustful of the BLG’s budget spokesman, Balfe, and preferred wherever possible to make budget speeches herself because of the high profile of the subject, despite not being a full member of the Budget Committee. She was not concerned about this, being more intent on ensuring that the right message was conveyed to the British press via her speeches. It meant that she was simultaneously trying to master the vagaries of the agricultural prices and budgetary mechanisms, with very little help. She took her assistant to Strasbourg, mainly to act as a runner, but did not have anyone in Brussels to help her with committee work.

In a major debate in September 1980 on the Regulation for the financial mechanism, Castle said the whole thing was an elaborate farce. She later revealed that Thatcher had told the House of Commons the money would not go on much-needed industrial development and local authorities but simply flow back to the Treasury. She accused Thatcher of planning further cuts in public expenditure. This was a difficult moment. Castle felt between a rock and a hard place. Smoking and fuming in her office over a gin and tonic, she realized the rebate that she had supported was worthless, but felt she could not be seen by the British press to be against it. By November she and Balfe failed to agree on whether to oppose the rebate. Acrimonious debate over the British rebate was to continue for years both in Parliament and in Council.

Late in 1980 in the debates on the 1981 budget Parliament sought to limit agricultural spending and to increase funding for energy policy, develop-

ment and social and regional efforts. By the time of the second reading later in the year there was also a supplementary 1980 budget in progress to make up for the deficiencies of the period when the earlier version had not been agreed and Parliament voted an increase in this. Some tricky manoeuvres were undertaken to achieve a satisfactory deal enabling the necessary spending. Labour remained generally critical.

A further stand-off occurred in 1981 when veteran European Spinelli was budget rapporteur and Parliament once again attempted to cut agricultural spending. This time Council agreed some of the reductions, but only a part of the proposed increases for social and regional spending. There were some arcane arguments as to whether or not Parliament's proposals went over the limit for "non-compulsory" expenditure (non-CAP). Matters came to a head with Council appealing to the Court of Justice against the Parliament. This struggle carried on for some time, finally culminating in a new inter-institutional agreement being signed in June 1982 between Parliament and Council.

The anti-marketeters were vigilant on other sections of the budget, notably Lomas, Buchan and Caborn attempting to cut subsidies to European Movements, always a bone of contention and described as propaganda vehicles by the comrades. Buchan too, kept a vigilant eye on attempts to increase subsidies for European schools which were one of her many bugbears. At that time the general budget was voted line by line, taking hours to vote and it was relatively easy to put forward amendments to increase or decrease specific "lines".

Spring 1982 saw the UK government attempt to block the annual package of farm prices so that some concessions could be found on "the bloody British question", as it had come to be known, and this found enthusiastic support from Castle and the BLG. Negotiations on the British rebate were complicated by taking place at the same time as there was general opposition in Council to Britain's uncompromising approach to the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands (Wall, 2008). There was a meeting of leaders in March to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome and Thatcher proved intransigent in her demand for a five year deal on Britain's funding. This was vetoed by Mitterrand who was clearly piqued by Britain's coupling of the issues of farm prices and the rebate. Britain thought it could invoke the "Luxembourg Compromise" as a veto. This had come into being as a political understanding in January 1966, following French boycotts of the Council. It was understood by Britain as a veto, but in fact was little more than an agreement to disagree. The idea was that in the case of majority vote decisions in Council, if an important national interest was at stake the Council would endeavour to reach a solution acceptable to all. Wall's account is that several other countries put a different interpretation on the so-called veto. Priestley points out that majority voting on agriculture prices was already in the Treaty. At the Agriculture Council on 11 May, Britain threatened "to bring the business of the EEC to a halt if the other members persisted in trying to force through a farm price increase against the wishes of the British government" (Wall, 2008). Plumb in Parliament voted to support the principle of majority voting on price fixing, "publicly distancing themselves [the EDG] from the policy of their own government". At the Council on 18 May, Peter Walker representing the government fell on his face when votes in Council were taken and Britain was defeated. This

was a crisis for Britain and relations with France were at a low point for the next year. The Labour Party called on the government to withhold its contributions to the EC, and although this would have been against EC law it was considered for some time as a possible strategy.

The unsolved problem of the UK rebate continued to cause grief, and Parliament rejected the next supplementary budget containing the UK refund by 259 – 78, saying it was not going to have any more ad hoc solutions. Castle made a fine four minute attempt in December 1982 to win over the majority before the vote. She said:

“I am not speaking for the Socialist group. I am speaking for my country’s rights... So when you are talking about this rebate today, you are not talking about charity. You are talking about something that was built into the terms on which Britain joined the European Community... What is at stake here today is one simple issue. That is that some of you want to punish Britain for the fact that the Community has failed to reform itself...It is absolutely true that Mrs Thatcher will not spend a penny of this on any item of regional policy or public works on which she had not intended to spend it in the first place. But whatever rules you may apply at this moment you will not force her to do that... So what I say is, let us all be honest with ourselves, realize that the fundamental solution is not being fought for by anybody and that it is intolerable that one Member State should be penalized for the collective cowardice of you all.”

Her passionate patriotism did not sway the majority.

The Commission President, Gaston Thorn, published a Green Paper on EC financing in the first part of the year. Its main proposal was an increase in Community “own resources” and suggested money for research, regional and social initiatives. This only led to fears of an even greater demands for funds from the UK. Thatcher was in any case opposed to research funding. There began complicated negotiations lasting the rest of the year right through the general election, the German Presidency and into that of Greece. The Stuttgart Summit of 1983 came and went (having been delayed to cope with the UK general election) with only a partial and temporary ad hoc solution for a rebate of £457 million despite the very real prospect of the EC running out of money. The proposed increase in “own resources”, comprising a one per cent levy of VAT across the Community, required the unanimous agreement of the Member States. There was no solution at the Athens Summit, where the French (Delors being by then Finance Minister) were not prepared to see the Greeks find a way forward.

In October Castle was castigating the Parliament again on the huge cost of disposal of agricultural surpluses on a proposal for an astonishing 10.5% increase in milk price. She said: “we have milk coming out of our ears...” She pointed out the absurdity of pouring milk into calves at one end, milking cows at the other and then having to pay to dispose of the product.

In November there was yet another round of debates about Christmas butter (the scheme to donate free butter to charities for distribution so as to reduce the cost of storing surpluses), with the BLG again voting against the budget. There was a huge row at that time since, with the financial cupboard bare, one of the ruses being contemplated to save money was a proposal to

put the UK rebate in Chapter 100. This was a reserve section which meant the money would be effectively frozen and would require a further vote in Parliament to release it. Encouraged by Labour MEPs, Parliament wanted the UK's 850 million ECU refund to be used on specific infrastructure programmes rather than as a direct reimbursement to the UK Treasury. Thatcher ensured there was no chance that this would be the case.

The 1983 budget was being considered at the same time as a supplementary and amending budget for 1982 that was to pay the UK's compensation. Parliament demanded that this should be the last ad hoc solution to the British refund, but never gained satisfactory assurances from the Council, which also rejected CAP reductions in the main budget. During the debate in December 1982, making a speech critical of the budget, Balfe said: "I challenge any Tory to come back to Britain and defend the Common Market against me publicly this weekend". The Conservatives abstained and the budget passed its second reading with Labour and the Socialist Group against.

The Budget Commissioner, Christopher Tugendhat (who had been a Conservative MP during the Heath government), was forced to admit that the 1983 budget was in ruins. In the projections for 1984, agriculture's share of the expenditure was still going up and there was not sufficient money to go round. The Council came up with a solution that was for a budget to cover only ten months' spending, technically illegal. Yet again Council proposed that the 1983 British rebate should be put in reserve. In October Castle again attempted to ride to the rescue. "Now really, to put in the budget the statement that the British rebate should go into reserve until the rest of us have managed to reform something, is to penalize the British people with a vengeance for the failure of the Community to reform itself." She suggested putting half of the agricultural spending in reserve instead. "We in the British Labour Group will oppose the proposal... It is absurd even to be contemplating an increase in the Community's own resources at the present time. You know you do not give more money to an unreconstructed delinquent. That is what this Community is." This unfortunately meant the BLG would vote against the report of the Socialist Group leader, Arndt, despite Castle praising his speech as being brilliant. It did not endear them to the Group members. Conservatives supported the Socialist text.

Labour again opposed the budget in December 1983. There were several different resolutions, including one from the Conservatives for rejection. Castle accused Conservative Neil Balfour of cowardice because many of his group were abstaining. Andrew Pearce accused Castle of representing a group of wreckers. There was a certain amount of confusion during the vote and some Conservatives did vote for rejection. Enright in an explanation of vote said:

"I dissociate myself from the craven cowardice of the British Tories who had the hypocrisy to vote for all the measures for their farmer friends and then vote for the rejection instead of joining with Mrs Castle's motion, which was asking, not for a battle of Britain, but for a battle of equity and transparency in this budget."

Griffiths pointed out that the Tories had voted against money coming to Britain from the Regional Fund.

The 1984 budget was in real crisis in that the ceiling of "own resources"

had been reached. Parliament froze both the UK rebate and five per cent of CAP spending, leaving the mess to be resolved in yet another Fontainebleau Council in June 1984 (France holding the Presidency of the Council once again). This had been preceded by intense negotiations between Geoffrey Howe for the UK and Roland Dumas for the French. A system was agreed in Parliament to compensate the UK on the revenue side of the budget and a new inter-institutional agreement was reached to increase the Community's own resources from one per cent to 1.4%. Thatcher in March had indicated she was prepared to accept the rise in the VAT contribution in time. This relieved pressure for the following year and the budget was passed. Yet again the BLG voted against on the grounds that the reforms were insufficient, but Parliament agreed to unfreeze the frozen funds and thus avoided a stalemate.

The Brussels Summit in March of 1984 collapsed in the face of British intransigence, with France and Italy blocking payment of the rebate. Britain threatened to withhold payments into the Community coffers and had even prepared some draft legislation to this effect, although this proposal was not popular with some Conservative MEPs. This threat, coupled with the leverage Thatcher had concerning the extra resources that would be needed in future as a consequence of Spain and Portugal's forthcoming accession, appeared to do the trick. The French opened negotiations, settling on a deal to cut milk output and a package of financial reforms including a modest increase in own resources. They had been reluctant to do this, not wanting to be seen to be giving way to the UK in the run-up to the European elections in June that year.

The inter-institutional agreement was to be a turning point in budgetary reform, giving Parliament a greater say in the structure of the budget. Somehow, via intense negotiations, Thatcher held out and won a two-thirds figure for the rebate that was to last two decades. It did not, however, win any friends in Europe.

More years were to pass before the various crises were able to be dealt with in a more coherent fashion and farm prices ceased to be the deciding factor. Clwyd battled furiously throughout for a doubling of the funding for social policy, supported by other Socialist colleagues from her committee, despite the general shortage of funds. Griffiths and others spoke out for strengthening the regional development fund and schemes to alleviate unemployment, and Adam plugged away for a reasonable research investment programme.

In those days the budget votes were a marathon line taking up to six hours, because each line was dealt with individually. In later years the negotiations mostly took place at the committee stage, with a "package" being put before plenary, thus considerably lessening the pain of hour upon hour of voting on matters of minute detail.

Fighting Thatcherism

By the beginning of 1980 unemployment was hitting hard in the constituencies of Labour Members and the Parliament became a battle ground of Labour against the Conservatives, who were forced into defending their government at home. The years 1980-81 saw recession blight the UK, par-

ticularly in the North, and 5,000 factories closed. The government failed to protect British interests on steel where the industry was being decimated in the face of international competition.

By the end of 1982 unemployment in the UK had hit three million. This situation persisted up to the 1983 general election and beyond as monetarist practices in the UK began to bite and it continued to be raised by Labour Members despite complaints from continentals that they should stick to European matters. Boyes, Seal, Griffiths, Caborn, Clwyd, Adam and others from hard-hit industrial areas joined in the fray, leaving Castle to continue her agriculture reform attempts and Quin valiantly struggling to try to save fishing communities. Fishing was frequently debated on a Friday morning before a thinly-attended House when many other Members had returned home. Boyes raised the problems of Consett in his constituency where the steelworks had closed – “a town destroyed” – but was attacked on one occasion by Tory Tom Spencer who said he could have taken some action in the Social Affairs Committee but had instead been at the Labour Party conference discussing withdrawal. Boyes also worked on nuclear disarmament issues (in June 1980 it was announced that 160 Cruise missiles would be sited in the UK) and constantly harangued the Tories and UK government over unemployment, with typical overstatement. In March 1982 he said “the butchering swine governing Britain are probably making decisions today – Budget day – that will ensure that tens of thousands more people go to an early grave.”

Margaret Thatcher wound up for the British Presidency in Strasbourg in December 1981 as the first head of government of a Member State occupying the Presidency to attend a session of the European Parliament for the purpose of giving an account of the European Council (London Summit). Despite three chapters of the Mandate of 30 May 1980 still not having reached agreement, she gave quite a conciliatory speech: “Our future lies in working together”. No Labour Member had the floor in her presence, though Castle had a good rant the following day: “Hope deferred makes the heart sick...stubborn adherence to a bankrupt monetarist policy has pushed up unemployment in GB to nearly 3 million... we are sick and tired of gesture politics, what we want are action politics” – and plenty more on the failings of the budget.

Labour MEPs were always actively campaigning at home alongside their local parties, MPs and Councils in opposing Conservative policies and presenting the Labour argument and used as much of their time and resources as they could to support local candidates in elections. One small blessing was the willingness of Commission officials to receive delegations from local authorities and businesses and to spend hours advising Councils how to get their hands on some of the structural funds. Most of the BLG Members, including Castle, were to take advantage of this and bring such groups across for meetings. Various Members also brought out to Brussels or Strasbourg delegations of workers either made redundant or about to become so, to demonstrate the problem and lobby the Commission for help. Boyes brought an NUM delegation in February 1982, and Clwyd brought redundant steelworkers, whilst Quin brought a delegation of shipyard workers.

The Social Affairs and Employment Committee wished to hold a meeting

in the UK in 1980 but the Conservatives managed to have the idea quashed, clearly realizing that it would be used as an opposition platform in the home media. This idea had been supported by Labour Members for precisely that reason.

Events leading to the British miners' strike held sway for a substantial period in the latter part of this Parliament and the strike itself dominated the early part of the next. It became increasingly bitter as the situation of the miners and their families became more and more desperate. In March 1984 Caborn, in one of his last interventions (having been elected to Westminster) hit out at the curtailment of civil liberties in the restrictions on people's movement in the UK. This had been put in place by the government in a vain attempt to stop flying pickets supporting the miners who were attempting to block the way of "scab" labour.

Labour at home and the birth of the SDP

The Labour Party grudgingly offered only a marginal role to its MEPs in party structures. Whilst MPs could not stand as MEPs without first resigning, the NEC in its wisdom agreed in June 1981 that: "A European Member of Parliament will be allowed to seek nomination for a UK Parliamentary constituency provided that he/she gives an undertaking in writing that if elected he/she will resign as a Euro MP at a time agreed with the NEC."

The BLG Leader was able to attend but not vote at NEC meetings (some suggested that Castle virtually invited herself to the NEC having been a member of it for so many years) and MEPs were exiled to the gallery at Labour conference at first unless, as in the case of some, they managed to be sent as delegates from some other organisation. In a few years they were at least included in the "ex-officio" MPs section where they could attempt to speak without a vote. At a meeting with Callaghan soon after the election Castle had proposed that MEPs should have full access to the House of Commons but after negotiations Rogers on the BLG's behalf settled for limited access. It was not until 31 January 1989 that MEPs were permitted passes to the Westminster palace complex. There was no formal European Leader's speech to conference.

MEPs often had to ask to be invited to speak at General Management Committee meetings in their constituencies and sometimes were pointedly not invited. Rogers recalls an attempt by one of his local MPs, Roy Hughes, to veto his attendance and when the party went ahead with inviting him to speak the MP ensured that he was not present at the same time. Even when they were present and eager to report, MEPs were often relegated to a few minutes of "any other business" after ten o'clock when the comrades were anxious to repair to the pub. This has not substantially changed.

Following a winter of civil war, the Labour Party on 31 May 1980 held a special conference at Wembley at which the principle of a rolling manifesto was agreed. This conference was the setting for a debate on voting mechanisms for a new system of an electoral college for election of Party Leader to include trade unions and constituency parties as well as MPs. The other main purpose of the conference was to approve the "Peace, Jobs and Freedom" policy statement. It was not entirely harmonious, with Militant delegate Terry Fields telling the right-wingers to get out of the party. Immediately fol-

lowing that, the Labour Common Market Safeguards Committee produced a document saying that the next Labour government should be elected on a clear mandate to withdraw from the European Community. Shortly afterwards, in an early development that would later lead to the formation of the SDP, David Owen, William Rodgers and Shirley Williams wrote to *The Guardian* opposing this notion. There had, of course, been earlier indications of this split when Roy Jenkins floated the idea of a breakaway party on 22 November in the Dimpleby lecture. Dianne Hayter, later General Secretary of the European Parliamentary Labour Party, records in her book *Fightback* (Hayter, 2005) that it was a failure of the right-wing Manifesto group to hold the social democrats within the Party, saying that some in that group thought at the time that the Labour Party was finished.

Nevertheless, by the time of Labour's conference in September 1980, a resolution (Composite 15) in favour of withdrawal was able to be carried by five million votes to two million on a card vote. With a two-thirds majority, the effect of this was that it was official policy and should be included in the next election manifesto. This was greeted as a "fantastic victory" by Tony Benn, and was to lead to substantial strife during the next few years in the BLG. Benn failed to be re-elected to the Shadow Cabinet. It was this conference that also approved a resolution in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament. In December 1980 Benn attended a meeting of the Socialist Group in Brussels, speaking on full employment, and defending the conference decision on withdrawal. He was comprehensively attacked by a line-up of continental heavyweights from a range of countries – Mario Dido, Gerhard Schmid, Katherina Focke, Eva Gredel, Hans-Joachim Seeler, Hellmut Sieglerschmidt, Giorgio Ruffolo and Antonio Cariglia.

In 1981 conference supported a Common Market resolution sponsored by Clive Jenkins' white collar union ASTMS reaffirming the contents of Composite 42 of 1978 and Composite 40 of 1979.

"It further recognizes that not only has no progress been made on these reforms but the position of the UK vis-à-vis the EEC has worsened in every respect... accordingly, Conference does not believe the demands to which we are committed are capable of being fulfilled and urges the Labour Party to include the withdrawal of the UK from the EEC as a priority in the next general election manifesto".

Buchan, speaking in support of this resolution, said: "Let us be clear. We are for Europe – the real Europe... the only way we can be for these things is out of the Common Market."

The manifesto, largely the work of Callaghan for the general election in 1979, had taken only a marginally more considered position, saying that Labour would be the only major party offering the prospect of bringing about fundamental and much needed reform of the EEC. However it did include a pledge to restore to the Commons the power to amend or repeal legislation applicable to Europe. Bill Rodgers, not long afterwards to become a founding father of the SDP, called the conference "a disaster".

Not long after, Callaghan resigned as Labour Leader. Candidates for Leader were Michael Foot, Denis Healey, Peter Shore and John Silkin. On the second ballot, Foot won and Healey became Deputy Leader, contrasting left and right in the top team. This combination of events seems to have been

the last straw for the Jenkinsites. The SDP was formed in March 1981, after Jenkins had completed his term as European Commission President at the end of 1980 and returned home to give substance to the Gang of Three. Twenty-eight Labour MPs joined and a number of peers, seriously splitting the Labour Party. They had mostly been active in Labour Committee for Europe. After this, Enright and Collins joined the Red Rose Group chaired by George Foulkes MP, wanting disaffiliation from LCE. It was not as starry-eyed pro-market as LCE but its members wished to see Britain's EEC membership continue and wanted to change the conference policy. Over a hundred other MPs on the right formed Labour Solidarity under the chairmanship of Roy Hattersley. Jenkins fought the Warrington by-election for the SDP in July 1981, but the seat was held for Labour by Doug Hoyle.

Some MEPs remember David Owen MP and other SDP heavyweights visiting Strasbourg to try to recruit the pro-marketeters. Collins, Key, Enright, Adam and Quin attended a dinner at one of Strasbourg's better restaurants, *Jean de Carolis*, but surprised their British hosts when their suggestions of joining the SDP were turned down by the MEPs, who maintained they were not interested in leaving the Labour Party. They remained loyal to the people who elected them. Quin later said "I am tribal Labour". None of this group ever left the Labour Party.

Considerable division existed in the party ranks at home, where support for mandatory reselection of MPs had gathered momentum. The next issue was on what basis. Solidarity put forward a proposal for "one person, one vote" in order to circumvent what was sometimes seen as "unrepresentative" local General Management Committees (GMCs). Trades unions, backed by the left, had put forward a 40 – 30 – 30 formula which scraped through early in 1981. One person, one vote was universally opposed by the left, including the so-called Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. The latter's argument was that it was the GMC delegates to which the MP reported and was accountable rather than the membership as a whole whom they maintained might not know the full story. With the left in the ascendancy the next few years saw eight Labour MPs deselected by their constituency parties.

In May of 1981 Labour gained control of the Greater London Council and left-winger Ken Livingstone ousted "moderate" Andrew McIntosh from the leadership of the Labour Group, and consequently the GLC. Shortly after this there was a challenge from left-winger Benn to Healey as Deputy Leader unleashing a massive battle between left and right in the party with six months of bitter campaigning. The right-wing Manifesto Group was calling on Foot to take action against Militant infiltration of more Constituency Labour Parties. In Parliament, a Group of Ten young MPs who felt they might never see a Labour government (thus losing their chance of ministerial posts) was formed, linking some right-wingers and some Tribunites. This group included Phillip Whitehead, later to become an MEP after losing his Westminster seat. Slowly the beginnings of a more pragmatic line from what started to become known as the "soft left" began to emerge. Healey hung on by a whisker as Deputy Leader, with some notable abstentions in the voting from Neil Kinnock and Joan Lester. A report on an inquiry into Militant was published in December 1981, proposing a register of organizations operating within the Labour Party. The report said that: "It is our

opinion that the Militant Tendency as presently constituted would not be eligible to be included in the proposed register...”

Over the next two years the party's internal battles reached crisis point. A hot debate was raging about expulsion of Militant supporters, numbering 3,500 by late 1982 at the time the organization was proscribed. In February 1983 the NEC bit the bullet and by 19 – 9 expelled five members of the *Militant* (newspaper) editorial board, a decision later upheld by conference. Immediately after that, a divided Labour Party lost the Bermondsey by-election. Life became more complicated, however, when Militant-controlled Labour in Liverpool recorded a better-than-average swing to Labour and returned a Militant MP. They had stood on the 1982 City Council elections on a policy destined for confrontation with the Tory government over Council tax.

By 1981 a written European Parliamentary report was permitted to be incorporated into the NEC Report to Conference, and Castle was able to chronicle some of the achievements of the MEPs in that and subsequent years.

Regular meetings took place between senior members of the PLP and officers of the BLG, in this and the next Parliament, and these were sometimes less than harmonious. There was disquiet in Westminster, to say the least, about there being no restrictions on MEPs putting in for House of Commons seats under party rules, but that MPs could not stand for the European Parliament (not that they generally wished to). However MPs slowly became aware that MEPs had budgets and offices in their constituencies producing literature, about which some MPs were far from happy. Caborn had told Fred Mulley MP he would stand against him and did so, successfully. Seal recalls accompanying Castle to one of these meetings and being faced with Healey shouting about MEPs setting up offices and circulating leaflets, using these superior resources to oppose MPs, few of whom at that time had staffed offices in their constituencies. Seal tried for selection in Bradford South in 1982 against a sitting MP but was not successful. Lomas applied for Newham North West where there was an acrimonious reselection battle against incumbent Arthur Lewis, but the NEC barred him from the list. Given attacks from Militant at one level, MPs were hyper-anxious about additional threats from across the Channel. By January 1981 the NEC had to modify its permission for MEPs to stand for Westminster seats, saying “that while no rule is being broken by any MEP standing against a sitting Westminster Labour MP, the NEC nevertheless urges that at the present time it would be in the interests of Party unity if they did not do so”. Fear and jealousy reigned at a time of huge insecurity in the run up to the 1983 election.

Seal was on the Campaign Committee for the 1983 general election representing the BLG and was frustrated at the amateur nature of the way the party was shaping up. He suggested employing a firm to do public relations work and finally at a later stage a compromise was reached. Although Peter Mandelson, a pro-European with extensive Young Socialist International experience, was not brought in until 1985, Seal believes he was in part a mover in improving the professionalism of the Labour Party.

Labour in Europe

The BLG annual meeting in April 1980 re-elected Castle as Leader and Caborn as Chair. Future differences began to be seen, however. There was a straight right/left contest between Collins and Megahy for Deputy Leader, won by Collins, and a contest between Buchan, Rogers and Balfe for Secretary/Whip. Rogers won that and Buchan was given the prize of press officer. Clwyd was elected for the Socialist Group Bureau in addition to the Leader.

Castle was so well-known that she did not stoop to putting out press releases during her time in the European Parliament. Her technique, when she had made a controversial speech or a *Daily Mirror*-type sound bite, was to go down to the Press Bar and chat to the British journalists there. They would often come knocking on her door “to ask Mrs Castle if there were any good stories”. Barbara did not use her courtesy title of “Lady” based on being the spouse of Lord Castle, but Parliament officials, tending to be sticklers for protocol would often use it which always infuriated her. It was another decade before she graciously accepted a life peerage in her own right.

Gaston Thorn, leading the Luxembourg Presidency from July 1980 beat off an offensive from Seal, who asked in a PQ: “what amendments would have to be made to the Treaty of Rome in order for a national Parliament to enact legislation to restore powers to decide whether Community legislation should be applicable to itself?” This zealous pursuit of official Labour policy was enthusiastically followed up by Megahy. Thorn suggested the idea seemed inconceivable and poured cold water on it, as one who had been involved in negotiating and signing the UK Treaty of Accession, pointing out there was no mention of such a right. Castle in her office later, scathingly used Margaret Thatcher’s terminology and referred to him as “poor little Gaston”.

The general policy of the BLG was to share out speaking time, but it was not always amicable. Clwyd recalls that Castle was furious that she was to speak against Norman Tebbit when he visited as Employment Secretary in September 1981 during the British Presidency. Clwyd was the logical speaker, the subject being the social situation and unemployment, as she was on the relevant committee, but it caused Castle to stalk out in a huff from Parliament’s chamber as Clwyd started speaking. The two never saw eye to eye and much later Clwyd wrote an article about Castle, mentioning an incident about a “fur” coat. This enraged Castle even more, since she was a strong supporter of animal welfare and her coat was *faux* fur. In a bar where this argument surfaced Castle threw her coat on the floor and shouted at Clwyd: “you be bloody Leader then” and stormed out, leaving colleagues to deliver the coat to her hotel room later on.

Quin also recalls Castle being angry when she took on a report on New Zealand butter – a hot issue in a time of butter surpluses. Supporting the old Commonwealth was a point of honour for Labour and Castle felt it would end up being a sell-out because of committee pressure. Quin, however, was a natural conciliator and, using her diplomatic strengths, managed to steer through a pro-New Zealand report which went to the vote on a Friday morning when British Members were in attendance and many of those opposed to New Zealand imports had gone home. Labour and Tories were

in agreement on this subject. A settlement on the import agreement was reached in October 1982.

The Bureau of the Socialist Group sent Castle, Rogers and Hume as a delegation to Athens in 1980 to talk PASOK into joining the Group. The Greeks had been inclined towards the Communist Group, but the team managed to win over the leftist party. Greece had not long emerged from the control of the Colonels and clearly must have felt that the Socialists offered a more powerful haven than the smaller group. Greek accession to the Community therefore brought a few more left-wingers from PASOK into the Socialist Group, and some of the BLG made new friends. At that time PASOK policy was also anti-market but it was not long before it changed, perhaps in acknowledgement of all the funding being poured into Greece. When January 1982 saw the halfway point of the Parliament, Labour gave up its Vice-Presidency so that the Greeks could have it (PASOK having won the Greek elections in October 1981). Dutch Socialist Dankert was elected President, but only after four ballots, following machinations by the Conservatives. Collins managed to retain his position as Chair of the Environment and Consumer Protection Committee.

Labour's anti-EEC policy at home often hit the press. In an article in *The Scotsman* in January 1981 Collins wrote: "while ultimate withdrawal must remain a possibility... it is certainly not a simple option nor is it a solution to all our problems." As yet Labour policy did not extend to the wide range of subjects that were being debated in Europe. The MEPs had no guidance on the vast bulk of policy that was being put before them for consideration, and soon learned to make it up as they went along, based on what they felt was the right thing to do. This approach was to last well into the second term before the party in the UK started taking some more notice and occasionally suggesting a line to their European wing.

The AGM in April 1981 re-elected Castle as Leader and Caborn as Chair. There was a re-run of the Deputy leadership contest between Collins and Megahy with Collins the victor again, and a new contest for Secretary/Whip between Balfe, Boyes and Rogers, with the latter re-elected. This time there was a contest for press officer and in Buchan's absence, Clwyd won. There had been some arguments about press releases, and a change to the Group's standing orders was agreed that insisted that all Group and individual press statements should be distributed to all. (It rarely happened.) Other standing orders included a provision that meetings should not last more than three hours (!) and also that elections should be by recorded vote. Socialist Group colleagues were astounded that Labour Members were expected to show their secret ballot papers to a BLG Member when voting in the Group. It was seen as Stalinist. This was the start of what was to become a bitter period lasting until the end of the decade. At home there had been a study group working to make a statement from the NEC to the 1981 conference but it was postponed when the chairman died.

Feelings became more heated during the year and in October 1981 several of the Group staged a press conference in Strasbourg and issued a statement to the effect that they would do everything possible to support Labour's policy of withdrawal from the Community. It was signed by Balfe, Buchan, Caborn, Lomas, Megahy and Seal. Balfe was not present. Caborn in the Chair insisted that there was no split in the BLG, to a barrage of questions

from the journalists, asking why Castle was not there and why they did not leave the Socialist Group. Geoff Meade of the Press Association asked that if Labour Party policy was so crystal clear, why was there so much confusion? Buchan's final word to the journalists was "please don't call us anti-Europe. We are for Europe, against the Common Market". The journalists didn't really get the distinction but enjoyed the spectacle of the BLG split. There was a fulsome bit of pre-publicity in *The Guardian* saying: "A week of tensions and bitterness among the seventeen British Labour members of the European Parliament will spill into the open in Strasbourg today...", and reporting that Seal and Lomas were understood to be seeking selection for UK parliamentary seats.

All the angst about potential restrictions on a Labour government's economic policies was beginning to look a little thin once the French Socialists under President Mitterrand, coming to power in 1981, began to operate the beginnings of a socialist economic policy that left Brussels able to do little more than wring its hands. Mitterrand let it be known that he thought the Labour Party was "not left enough".

Argentina invaded the Falklands on 2 April 1982. Labour Members in a debate on the crisis in May argued for a diplomatic and economic rather than a military solution. Arndt of the Socialist Group, and a former conscientious objector, was angry with the UK over the war. On 14 June Healey, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, was in Strasbourg and there was a dinner at one of the better restaurants, *L'Arsenal* with the BLG officers present, and also Thomas von der Vring, a Socialist MEP who was a professor of economic philosophy. Collins recalls that the company started an argument about Descartes and Popper, the conversation started in English and finished in German and when the topic of discussion moved on to jazz piano Castle fell asleep and had to be woken up for the dessert course. (This was after a long day starting at 5am.) The next morning, Healey was heard to remark very pointedly: "Good morning Barbara, did you have a good sleep?" She was not amused. It was the date of the Argentine surrender and it is said that Healey heard about it from his taxi driver (BBC radio and TV not being piped into hotel rooms in that town).

One of the Socialist Group's "study days" meetings was held in Bradford in 1982, acting on Seal's persuasion. He wanted to highlight the problems in the textile industry and get some publicity for that. It had mixed results in terms of media coverage. Seal had persuaded the Group not to bring the parliamentary chauffeured cars over because of fear of a bad press about luxury (there were already "gravy train" accusations in the press from time to time) and he had to do a deal with local car dealers for transport. However this was a mixed blessing because of the Parliament's Sicilian drivers who were imported. There was a picket line on one route about a hospital closing and a driver forgot which side of the road he was on and managed to demolish some road works. Embarrassment also came from Willy Brandt's bodyguards who were stopped at the airport because they had guns. On a slightly more amusing note, one of the parsimonious Dutch Members camped out in a tent rather than use a hotel. This caused quite a fuss, according to Jan Kurlemann, then a Socialist Group press officer. The Dutchman had been on to the local press complaining that his family could not rent bicycles and it turned out that the reason was that they had no address, because of the camping. *The*

Yorkshire Post was most interested in this story. There followed a row in the Bureau about potential misappropriation of expenses and the upshot was that this particular Member did not make it onto his country's list at the next election. The whole event was a disappointment for Seal, with the bad press overshadowing his hopes of being seen as a champion of the textile industry. He was furious about the way things had turned out and turned his fire on Dick Gupwell, the staffer in charge of its organization, wanting him sacked. That did not help Labour's relations with the Group Secretariat.

Rogers produced a report on a natural gas policy for Europe, with the help of British members of the committee staff and both British and Germans staffers for the Socialist Group and today he maintains that the content of the report still holds true. It is an example of an anti-European seeing that in some areas the European dimension did offer advantages.

Castle, when not working to reform the CAP, was busy on the Bureau of the Socialist Group trying to make changes to its organization. Her work there was largely unsung, but considered important and her combative nature did not extend to her relationship with the staff, where she was seen as a conciliator. She wanted a research department to be set up, something that she never achieved. Pensions for the staff of Members were also to receive her attention and her own assistant convened a working group amongst British Labour assistants to share experiences. Assistants generally had a poor deal, lacking benefits such as maternity leave and pensions and Castle began a campaign to change this, a process lasting for decades and culminating many years later in a draft Statute for Members' Assistants. This was eventually agreed in 2008.

Parliament's positions were renegotiated in January 1982. For the BLG, Rogers was no longer a Vice-President of Parliament, but Collins retained his Chair of Environment and Gallagher held on to his Vice-Chair of Energy and Research. Clwyd became Chair of the Portugal Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) helping to negotiate accession; Adam took Vice-Chair of the EFTA Committee from April 1983. Key won Vice-Chair of the JPC for Spanish accession. Megahy became a Vice-Chair of the Credentials Committee, Quin was Chair of the Australia and New Zealand delegation from April 1983 and Rogers Vice-Chair of the Canada delegation. Seal hung on to his REX Vice-Chair.

Change afoot

Michael Foot and Eric Heffer visited the Socialist Group in Brussels on 10 February 1982, with Foot stating that he expected a firm withdrawal policy to be included in the next general election manifesto, "as not a policy in isolation, but part of Labour's Socialist alternative". Despite genuine warmth for him as a person, he met with a barrage of strong criticism from Group members. A senior German, Erwin Lange, spoke of the dangers of the national socialism that had led to World War II, saying we needed each other. Seeler, also SPD, said: "we are being hard in our comments to stop our UK comrades making a monumental error". Arndt said that Benn's comments on his earlier visit had been patronizing. Italian and French colleagues spoke of the need for the solution to be European and said that Labour was not helping in the fight against conservative forces. Even

PASOK members from Greece spoke of real prospects for change in the CAP and budget. It was an uncomfortable reception for the British visitors.

A few days later on 19 February 1982, Clwyd wrote in the *New Statesman* on “Why I have changed my mind on the Common Market”. This was a courageous piece given the climate at home, and she says that explaining to constituents how she had changed her mind was quite tough. “They were hostile and it took a lot of time”, she said many years later. The secretary of Cardiganshire constituency was John Marek (later an MP) who would not let her speak since she had become pro-market. In her article, she spoke of international solidarity in practice, when a Dutch Socialist colleague helped organize a meeting between workers’ representatives in a multinational in her constituency and the Netherlands. She said that:

“The Parliament does lack power to back its sometimes radical proposals... but Labour policy is set firmly against increasing the power of the ‘Assembly’. You can’t hobble a horse and then criticize its lack of speed. The French government at the moment is about to challenge EEC rules on import controls and if it succeeds then one of Labour’s many reasons for withdrawal will be challenged.”

She asked the Labour Party to think again with the example of Mitterrand’s new socialist government in France pursuing its own economic strategy.

This piece was seized upon with joy in the Socialist Group. Its Secretary General, Paolo Falcone, circulated it to all Members with a cover note that read: “Dear Comrades, At the request of several Group members, the Secretariat has pleasure in enclosing the text of the above-mentioned article which we hope will make pleasant reading”. Clwyd recalls that the staff were markedly more friendly to her after that.

The article caused a stir and it was not without a certain amount of poison. Clwyd says Janey Buchan did not speak to her for years afterwards, and accused her of losing the Hillhead by-election by writing the article. (This by-election on 25 March 1982, caused by the death of the incumbent Conservative MP, was contested by Roy Jenkins for the newly-formed SDP following the victory of Shirley Williams in Crosby and Jenkins’ own failure to win Warrington earlier. He won, with Labour coming third after the Conservatives. It was not likely to have been won by Labour and indeed was not to be a Labour seat until George Galloway’s victory in 1987.)

At the AGM of 1982 again Castle was re-elected Leader, Caborn was Chair, and Collins was Deputy (still opposed by Megahy). Rogers once more beat off an attempt by Boyes to oust him as Secretary/Whip. An understated Leader’s report from Castle mentions “some disagreements over policy”. It also said that the work of individuals on their committees had impressed the Socialist Group, which had shown remarkably little resentment towards the BLG despite the fact that during his visit to the Group earlier in the year Michael Foot had re-affirmed the Labour Party policy of withdrawal from the EEC. Clwyd and Castle were elected to the Socialist Group Bureau and Clwyd was subsequently sent on a three week tour of the USA to explain the Group’s policy to control multi-nationals and what the European Parliament was all about.

A Walworth Road (by then Labour Headquarters) Research Paper in

April 1982 was a last-ditch attempt to dissuade the party from fighting the next Euro-elections. It countered all arguments in favour, by saying:

“If we fight the election the public would be confused and would not understand our reasons, and thus our case for withdrawal would be severely undermined. They would not understand how a party committed to leave an institution was nevertheless seeking to be represented in that institution. One could draw the analogy here with the House of Lords – the public are confused by the creation of Labour peers when we are committed to abolishing the second chamber.”

Nevertheless, in May the NEC narrowly decided that the party should contest the 1984 elections.

In response to the intemperate earlier NEC paper, the members of the Brussels Labour Group took the unusual step of publishing their own pamphlet in May with a suitably red cover, entitled “British withdrawal from the EC?” Not to be confused with the British Labour Group (of MEPs) – the BLG, the Brussels Labour Group consisted of Labour Party members working in the Community institutions, who unsurprisingly were entirely pro-EEC. Their pamphlet was a 34-page closely argued commentary on the NEC’s 1981 report to conference on withdrawal. It was full of facts and figures about trade and the like and cited the socialist economic policy being pursued by Mitterrand in France. This did not endear these officials to the BLG, but they were unrepentant.

Collins had also written a paper as a commentary on the NEC paper, saying that it was a pessimistic and confused document and that “its main argument is a piece of punk Marxism”. He also produced a substantial paper on environment, public health and consumer protection policy, pointing out their importance to people at home and explaining the reasons that the best place for their development was in Europe. The Labour Movement for Europe also put out a pamphlet entitled “The Economic Consequences of Withdrawal”, arguing that it would be damaging for the economy.

By September Castle was making an attempt to influence Labour’s conference policy on the EEC. It was now her turn to write a piece in the *New Statesman* (17 September 1982) entitled “Let Them Throw Us Out”. She saw it as a pragmatic article, still holding on to her anti-market stance. But others such as Lomas and Balfe saw it as a U-turn. They attacked her in a letter published in that magazine, calling her dishonest and naïve in wanting to stay in the Community but break the rules and saying that she was not fit to be Leader. Megahy called the article “a formula for fudge”, preferring his out-and-out opposition to the EEC. Although Castle remained defiant, insisting that she had not become pro-market, jibes such as this did hurt. In the article she argued that Labour was always being negative and as such was failing to get its policies across. Thatcher was being radical, positive and populist. A Labour government should simply proceed with its policies and wait for the European authorities to react to us; it was not, she argued, too late for the Labour Party to adapt its approach. Again, this piece was received well in the Socialist Group. She records in her diary that Carlo Ripa di Meana said: “your article is very, very important”. Castle also maintained that her change of mind influenced both Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock’s views of the EEC.

Although Labour's conference did not change its policy in 1982 the mood was arguably beginning to soften in some quarters. Quin and Boyes wrote an article in *Labour Weekly* prior to the 1983 general election asking why not, if Labour were elected, to proceed with its economic policies and see how Europe would react.

Whilst Castle was keen to attend NEC meetings in London, she was less interested in attending some of the Socialist Group "study days" meetings that were normally held at the same time as Socialist Confederation party meetings. She referred to them as "junkets" and did not bother to attend the Confed's congress in Paris in November 1982, leaving her representation to her assistant and Jan Royall. She would have received a warm reception had she attended, but was preoccupied with her traditional family Guy Fawkes celebrations at her home in Buckinghamshire.

Castle was also not present at the BLG's annual meeting in April 1983, being at home actively campaigning for the hoped-for Labour government. As a former Cabinet Minister she was still one of the most well-known and popular Labour figures. She was re-elected as Leader, along with Caborn as Chair, though the latter was opposed by Griffiths on the grounds of trying to improve the left/right balance amongst officers. Caborn had, by this time, been selected for a safe Westminster seat. A battle this time between Collins and Lomas for Deputy ran to a second ballot, with Collins maintaining his position. There were, however, grumbles that one person should not hold a position in the Parliament in addition to one in the BLG (Collins being chair of a major committee). Rogers was re-elected Secretary/Whip and Enright was elected press officer. For the second Socialist Group Bureau member, there was a contest between Clwyd and Seal. After a tie on the first ballot Clwyd withdrew. Boyes successfully moved an amendment to standing orders that henceforth all BLG votes should be recorded. Members had to call out on a roll call whether they were for or against every proposal. This was to cause bad feelings for many years until it was finally rescinded in 1991.

MEPs at work

Bit by bit Griffiths, Boyes and Clwyd, supported by some of their other colleagues, fought for regional and social funds to be put to use to help combat unemployment, poverty and disability. This was given more impetus after the accession of Greece in 1981. Their arguments began to fall on fertile ground in Brussels, and the seeds of the urban part of the European Regional Development Fund were sown during those years. There were to be arguments about additionality (the policy that EEC funds should be additional to national funding). Boyes would oppose Griffiths on the latter's attempts to develop an urban fund outside the geographic distinctions of assisted areas, fearing dilution of financial assistance, but the impetus for change was growing.

Derek Enright, a former classics master, was always prominent in the Chamber with his distinctive deep voice, witticisms and ability to demolish opponents. He managed to confuse the interpreters from time to time by breaking into Latin, classical quotations and literary puns. They loved him for the challenge of it, whilst not always managing to do more than simply tell the audience that the speaker had made a joke. In addition to pursuing

development issues he busied himself by taking up the cudgels to stop plenary sessions being held in Luxembourg and arguing for Brussels. Once, when attempting to circumvent the smokescreen being put up by the Parliament Bureau on decisions for meeting places, he observed: “the Bureau is showing about as much sensitivity as a herd of elephants attempting a ballet dance on ice”. Luxembourg, holder of the Presidency for the latter half of that year, hosted a plenary meeting of the Parliament in June 1980 to substantial protest from British Members about extravagance and inconvenience. Tom Spencer for the Conservatives attacked the (lack of) aesthetic qualities of the new hemicycle. Castle and others grumbled about the shortage of facilities for Members, the “narrow seats like battery hens and not even allocated tables at which we could write our speeches.” Enright’s campaign eventually met with some success. Another Luxembourg plenary was held in December 1980 and the last one in that electoral period was held in February 1981, despite the government having built a new plenary especially to house the Parliament. After much more pressure from Luxembourg, a final plenary was held there in July 1985, but thereafter meetings in that city were generally for the Council of Ministers or committees. The first Brussels plenary meeting, described as an open meeting of the enlarged Bureau, was held in April 1983, followed by another in June. Eventually “mini” plenary sessions in Brussels were to become part of the accepted timetable of the Parliament.

Acting on a Socialist Group suggestion, Parliament had set up an ad hoc committee on the position of women in the Community, after an unsuccessful early attempt to set up a women’s rights committee. Chaired by a formidable French socialist feminist, Yvette Roudy, the committee produced a massive multi-subject report debated in February 1981. London Conservative Dame Shelagh Roberts was active in tabling amendments (mostly defeated) in an attempt to reduce some of its ambitious proposals and the Conservatives had a free vote. Roberts felt that including issues about women from the developing world was outside its mandate. She objected to attempts to redefine conditions in which support was given by the regional and social funds, and said Members should “look very carefully at proposals for providing the same benefits for part-time workers as are provided for full-time workers... and at proposals for job sharing...” Derek Enright, Labour’s “honorary woman” on the committee attacked her position and made points about the need for improvements in benefits and pensions for women. In defence of taking up a post on the Women’s Committee, he had much earlier said “unless we fight for the status of women, we degrade the dignity of men”.

The Socialist Group put forward a successful resolution in April 1982 to set up inter-parliamentary delegations to various parts of the world and over the years many Labour Members were to become active on these delegations, using them as a vehicle to pursue human rights and economic development in a way that far outreached their formal role. There were always some, however, who simply enjoyed the interesting opportunities to travel to foreign countries. At first this was in first class, and Members were also able to use the price of such a ticket to buy tickets in economy and take their spouses. Barbara Castle was given special dispensation to take her niece after Ted died. But by the nineties purse tightening reduced this to business class. On one occasion there was a parliamentary delegation to

Sierra Leone, and as a substitute member of the Development Committee Castle went along, with Enright. However she could not resist drawing attention to the trip as a “gravy train” in the press, earning the wrath of her fellows on the delegation. Enright and his wife Jane stuck by her and they forged a friendship despite their political and European policy differences.

Parliament’s first public hearing was held on a consumer action plan during 1980 and the committee, chaired by Collins and assisted by staffer Michael Wood, went to Dublin Castle for the event, with an Irish rapporteur. It was a high profile event including Charles Haughey, the Irish Prime Minister, and was so well attended that there had to be an overspill room. It was one of the first indications of real interest in the work of the Parliament other than on budgetary matters.

Meanwhile, Collins and his committee were working on proposals to protect workers from lead and also pressing for a ban on the toxic herbicide 245-T. Jack Cunningham, Shadow Environment Minister at home, had given Collins the green light to develop policy, as it was ahead of any Labour position taken to date. Ken pursued this vigorously and was instrumental in Parliament’s resolution criticizing the delay in introduction of lead free petrol in May 1984. Policy development of this kind was to take place on numerous occasions over the years, not only on environment policy. Matters were being dealt with at the European level in advance of home policy being developed. MEPs began to get used to using their own judgement as to the best position to take. Following the Seveso disaster the Environment Committee pushed for a Committee of Inquiry which was set up in July 1983 on the Treatment of Toxic and Dangerous Substances and reported in May 1984. A heavy industrial lobby on packaging of liquids earned Collins’ wrath in July 1983 where he attacked the unsatisfactory level of democracy and lack of transparency on the part of the Commission in a vitriolic speech in the Chamber.

The Environment Committee became active in work on the prevention of acid rain and many other topics. Indeed an environment issue was to be a pivotal tool in giving Parliament a de facto delaying power which it could use to bargain for amendments, this being used to great effect by Collins and others. This was the famous Isoglucose judgement of the European Court of Justice in 1980 that struck down legislation because the Council of Ministers had adopted it before Parliament had given its opinion. Collins was to make good use of that judgement in delaying tactics over the years in order to force policy concessions from the Commission and Council. His first use was threatening to refer back to committee a proposal about meat inspection in the face of the Commissioner’s refusal to negotiate. Within a very short time he had representatives of both Commission and Council in his office concerned about disruption of the meat industry and prepared to make concessions. He delighted in saying the Parliament at that time had no teeth but made effective use of its gums.

Castle worked furiously hard at reform of the CAP but was sometimes her own worst enemy. She eschewed the assistance of the Socialist Group staffer on the Agriculture Committee, at that time a genial and bright Dutchman Rob Van de Water, and would table her own amendments, since they were often unlikely to receive the blessing of the Socialist Group. On voting mornings she could be found at her desk at 7am, furiously cursing

and smoking, trying to read dozens of amendments and produce an unofficial BLG voting whip, since on CAP reform Labour differed from the Socialist Group much of the time. On one occasion she was so exasperated with the text of a report by Plumb that she submitted a “delete all and insert...” lengthy amendment, which was ruled out of order.

As a distraction from the ongoing drama of the budget, the British rebate and the regional and social funds, Parliament was also deliberating the Vredeling Directive, the right for workers to have information about the intentions of their multinational companies. It was yet another area where Labour had some doubts, despite supporting the principle. On the one hand, as Boyes put it as rapporteur, powerful companies were lobbying against it. “With 12 million unemployed, if we reject this directive, how can we expect trade unionists to take us seriously?” On the other hand, there were some differences of nuance. Labour Members were firmly of the view that representatives on the boards should come from trades union members. But the prevailing continental view was that they should simply be worker representatives, and not necessarily from the unions. Caborn later voiced the concern that in the UK experience at the British Steel Corporation, workers who were not unionists went on the board and were isolated. Ivor Richard, the British Commissioner for Social Affairs and Employment from 1982, who was attempting to steer this directive through the system, was not greatly loved either in the Socialist Group or the BLG, due to his aloofness and his campaigning to change Labour policy on Europe.

In the end, the BLG and Socialist Group voted against the emasculated proposal. Caborn in 1983 said it had been watered down to an unacceptable extent. Even right-winger Enright attacked Commissioner Richard as “a wee sleekit timorous cowering beastie”. (No idea what the interpreters made of this quote from Robbie Burns but it was the sort of challenge they enjoyed.) This was despite a special meeting of the BLG in December 1982 where Labour Members voiced their concerns and heard a threat from Richard to withdraw the proposal altogether. It was to take years before it finally succeeded. Nevertheless the BLG supported the final vote on the directive in this parliament which was defeated by only six votes (Conservatives against). Those rights would have been relevant to workers’ struggles in numerous companies making redundancies in this period, such as Times, Hyster and Caterpillar. There was more ideological arguing in October 1983 on a report on the control of concentrations between undertakings. Once again the Vredeling proposals were relevant and Caborn, gratuitously insulting two at once, said: “Mr von Bismark does for transparency of multinationals and workers’ rights in this report what Mr Bangemann does for hang-gliding” (Bangemann being of substantial physique). The Irish Presidency established an ad hoc working party in 1984 to seek a compromise but it proved to be a knotty issue. The directive setting up works councils was not finally agreed until 1994.

Most of the BLG waded in from time to time with numerous human rights concerns and defence of left-wing movements in countries such as Nicaragua, Chile and El Salvador. South African apartheid, the need for sanctions and the plight of Nelson Mandela were also constant topics for protest. Generally these actions were across the board and not a left or right prerogative, but there were also frequent political differences.

Anti-market views did not stop them speaking in favour of EU institutions

being located in the UK in the hope of creating jobs. For instance Castle in March 1982 was arguing for the European Trade Mark Office to be given to Manchester.

Adam concentrated through his parliamentary career on energy and research subjects and became particularly engrossed in this once a research fund had been set up in the budget. He was for many years budget rapporteur for that committee and rarely strayed from that subject unless he was putting forward something directly concerning his constituency in North East England such as fishing. He said that his budget work often kept him working through the July and August holiday periods, and clearly was deeply committed to the work. His main point of controversy with some of his fellows was a quiet but diligent support for nuclear energy.

Covering up public disunity had not yet become a high priority for the BLG, who were divided North/South on whether or not to support proposals for a Channel Tunnel. Those from the North were fearful that it would cause further unemployment in their regions. In general the tunnel was seen as a violation of British virginity. In later years when the proposal became more concrete concerns were voiced on a number of levels, including fears that rabies-ridden animals would run through it and bring the disease to Britain.

Boyes and Balfe were on opposite sides on whether to support NATO in November 1983, when Boyes opposed Cruise missiles (deployed in the UK on 14 October and rolled out within months to Germany and Italy) and Balfe offered an explanation of vote in favour on a matter concerning the defence of Western Europe. Liberals supported the Conservatives in a joint resolution opposed by the BLG.

One subject on which there was universal agreement, however, was on proposals for the extension of VAT to food and children's clothes. This battle ran on for years, with the BLG vociferously opposed. They tabled frequent questions to the Commission and lost no opportunity to put their point of view for the retention of zero-rating. It remains as an unresolved matter today.

Seal was working on the renewal of the Multifibre Agreement (on textile trade with other countries) in a vain attempt to offer some protection to the textile industry at home, which was being badly hit by closures and redundancies. He spoke in favour of socialist planning and said he was constantly trying to persuade his local factories to modernize in the face of aggressive competition, but to no avail. He would sometimes meet with Larry Whitty, then with the GMB union, at Heathrow airport on textile workers' matters. In the UK, Freddie Laker planned to extend his transatlantic "Skytrain" budget airline concept to intra-European flights, to protests from Seal who complained that if Thatcher's ideas were to continue we would see regional airports disappearing. He had a personal interest in this, having taken his pilot's licence and a part share in a small plane. Key took issue about proposals for deregulation of air transport.

By mid-term Castle and some others, including Conservatives, were raising animal welfare issues, including cruel battery farming methods. Five million signatories were tabled on a petition in March 1982 against imports of baby seal products. There was something of a cross-party alliance here in that an "own initiative" report was produced pressing for an import ban,

finally resulting in a Commission proposal (but remaining controversial sixteen years later). Tory Spencer was complaining about the cruel production of foie gras (which BLG members boycotted in restaurants). Collins joined him in a debate where it was revealed that exports to the UK of foie gras had increased saying: "I can only point out that this is yet more evidence that life under the Conservatives is bad for geese." In February 1984 Castle was calling for harmonization of legislation on the import of pets. There was much more on animal welfare to come in the second term.

Enright, right-wing credentials notwithstanding, was still able to make a vicious verbal attack on Conservative Adam Fergusson. In October 1983 making an explanation of vote about arms sales, Enright said he was speaking as a member of Parliamentarians for World Order and that it was a "disgrace that Mr Fergusson, otherwise known as 'stop me and buy bombs' has not been present... he is trying to peddle arms throughout the world to create war elsewhere..." There was some bitterness at this time, as the American-led invasion of Grenada had just taken place. The attack clearly did not deter Fergusson, who a month later was speaking in support of Cruise missiles.

Ann Clwyd spent time travelling round during International Year of the Disabled, comparing how other countries treated their elderly and disabled people. She used the unfavourable comparisons to campaign against the Conservatives at home and also argued for a directive on disability based on the West German system.

In Spain the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) won the election in October 1982, becoming the first left-wing government since 1936. Relations with the Socialist Group were being strengthened in preparation for accession. Despite being against the EEC, British Members supported enlargement, particularly to include Greece. The accession of Spain and Portugal had been put back and in November 1983 the BLG spoke out against delay. They and the Socialist Group were keen to bring the countries that had so recently suffered under the fascist regimes of Franco, Salazar and the Greek Colonels into the democratic European influence.

Draft Treaty on European Union

Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Emilio Colombo, the German and Italian Foreign Ministers, in November 1981 launched an ad hoc working party to look at treaty reform and consider a European act at the same time as there were similar stirrings in the European Parliament. The Council initiative was to complicate Britain's fraught negotiations on the UK budget rebate and was used by Thatcher as a negotiating tool in rebate discussions.

Altiero Spinelli, the veteran Italian former General Secretary of the European Federalist Movement and European Commissioner, who been imprisoned for seventeen years under Mussolini, took the initiative in June 1980, circulating a letter to all MEPs setting out his ideas for a parliamentary initiative to reform the Treaty. The first dinner of eight cross-party Members took place in the restaurant *Le Crocodile*, hence the name. Those present included Altiero Spinelli (Independent), Richard Balfe (Labour), Brian Key (Labour), Stanley Johnson (Conservative), Paolo Gaiotti de Biase (EPP), Karl von Wogau (EPP), Hans August Lucker (EPP), Silvio Leonardi (Italian

Communist) and Bruno Visentini (Italian Liberal). Balfe points out that “the founding of the Crocodile Club, like many things in the EP was a confusing affair with a number of dinners... before it was officially founded”. After the first dinner Key dropped out and Collins joined the group. This group began to meet monthly and issued the first Crocodile Newsletter in October. By December there were eighty MEPs interested and the group became instrumental in developing a draft “Crocodile resolution” which by the summer of the next year had attracted 179 signatories, proposing a Parliament working party. In July 1981, just after Thatcher had asked for “our money back”, the cross-party group, now constituted as the Crocodile Club, supporting European federalism and treaty reform succeeded in getting a resolution passed by the Parliament by 164 – 24, to set up a Committee on Institutional Affairs. Public statements critical of the EEC notwithstanding, Balfe was a founder member. The new committee was constituted in January 1982. Richard Corbett (who became a Labour MEP in December 1996) was on the Parliament staff for this and Geoff Harris followed it in the Socialist Group secretariat.

The majority of the BLG had nothing to do with this initiative, and it did not appear to register on the radar of the Labour Party at home at that stage. However the Genscher/Colombo initiative was seen by the government as something on which it was important to remain constructively engaged, with the proviso that it would not require major treaty amendments. Officials tended to think that its proposals were neither new nor particularly pivotal. At the very moment when use of the Luxembourg Compromise was being floated in the Council over farm prices in 1982, the other issue on the table in the Council was negotiations on the draft declaration on European Union.

Meanwhile in Parliament the debate and proposals had begun laying the foundations for a draft Treaty Establishing European Union in February 1984. There were to be three Spinelli reports and votes over the next year whilst the treaty was being developed. In one such debate we saw Rogers beginning to manifest a more positive attitude to the Community; on the Spinelli report in July 1982 he said “... if it is to be a Europe for the deprived... that is clean and fit for people to live in ... freedom from fear of poverty, sickness and old age... that is a Europe we could support.” Another debate in October saw numerous Conservatives taking part in the debate but no BLG Member speaking. Treaty reform of the federalist kind was definitely not part of Labour’s European policy. Some felt it was simply Euro-Thatcherism. Megahy for Labour spoke in Parliament’s April debate to say that here we have the “same old platitudes about the drive towards European integration... stop all this European flag waving and so-called advance to a European federalism that nobody in Europe in their right senses wants”. He had another stab during the debate in September, calling it “a dangerous illusion”. Needless to say the BLG remained against on all three votes. Collins, Enright and Adam abstained, although five had signed the Crocodile resolution. There appeared to be no particular input from the Labour HQ to its MEPs on this subject.

In April 1983 the draft Act (rather less ambitious than the original Genscher/Colombo proposals) was adopted in Council and this became the “Solemn Declaration on European Union” at the Stuttgart Council in June

1983. The British government took part in the European “re-launch” by putting forward a paper pushing for a Single Market.

One of the spinoffs from the Declaration was that the Heads of Government agreed to report to the European Parliament after each European Council meeting and that there would be an annual report on progress towards European union, which would be presented by the President of the Council. Additionally, each Presidency was to put forward its work programme to the Parliament at the beginning of its work. Parliament could also vote on the programme of a new Commission and give an opinion on international agreements and accession. This was a quiet increase in Parliament’s powers that would be put to good use in the years to come.

It was always a surprise that Margaret Thatcher was prepared to put her signature to the Solemn Declaration. Whilst she was in favour of a Single Market for economic purposes, she did not support more power being given to the European Parliament, which the Solemn Declaration embodied. Thatcher, uncharacteristically pragmatic said: “I took the view that I could not quarrel with everything and the document had no legal force. So I went along with it.” (Thatcher, 1993). She had, however, prevented the document being called an Act and anything that might require a treaty change and the government had done its best to water down the final text. One of the shreds that she clung on to was that the Declaration spoke about the EU as being a process and not a goal. Harris, Socialist Group staffer and a strong federalist, was jubilant, saying it was a very important step forward, but many Labour MEPs saw it simply as another piece of European wishful thinking. Harris proved to be right in the long run.

Federalist enthusiasts in the Parliament, however, were not content to let developments rest with the Stuttgart Declaration. Spinelli pushed forward and produced Parliament’s own draft Treaty on European Union, voted through in February 1984. This proposed that Parliament and Council would become a bicameral legislative body. In the debate, Rogers maintained that the majority of European people did not want to be led down this federalist road. Megahy gave an explanation of vote saying that it would take us to a European super state and remove the national veto. Balfe said that “it means nothing in Catford, Peckham or Deptford” (his constituency) and voted with the BLG against it. Gallagher said that as the only representative of the UK Social Democrat/Liberal Alliance he would vote in favour and cited an opinion poll in the UK saying that the majority of voters would like the Parliament to have more control over Community affairs. The Tories had a free vote, and Labour remained against. There were numerous amendments and a range of different votes. In the final roll call vote the draft Treaty was supported 237 – 31 with 43 abstentions. Castle in her autobiography (Castle, 1993) records: “I sat helplessly as the Parliament passed Spinelli’s draft Treaty of Union.” Most of the Socialists and Conservatives voted in favour, but for the Tories Brian Hord and Christopher Prout were against, as was Revd. Ian Paisley. The Labour Members voting against were Balfe, Buchan, Caborn, Castle, Clwyd, Griffiths, Megahy, and Quin loyally following the Group decision. Labour abstentions were Adam, Collins, Enright (saying that it was an attempt to substitute slogans for action) and for the Tories, Peter Price and Michael

Welsh. Boyes, Seal, Lomas, Key and Rogers were not recorded as having voted. None of the Labour Members voted in favour.

The upshot of this was that the Heads of Government at Fontainebleau set up a special committee, chaired by Senator Dooge of Ireland to study the Community's future development. The British representative was Malcolm Rifkind, then Europe Minister at the Foreign Office, whose main aim was to pursue the government's "Europe – the Future" document outlining a vision for a Single Market. There was to be more during the next parliamentary period.

General election disaster

The atmosphere in the Parliament became highly charged in the run up to the UK general election of 1983 with Labour and Conservative MEPs frequently trading insults on farm prices, on South Africa, on unemployment, on equal treatment for women and any number of other matters.

Lomas accused the Commission of bias for holding a press conference in London in March the day after the Conservatives had a TV broadcast attacking Labour's withdrawal policy. In April the Tory Richard Simmonds attacked the BLG saying it needed a strategy on the unemployment that would ensue should Labour withdraw from the Community. After the election defeat things quietened down and normal business resumed. Both Clwyd and Enright later spoke of being fairly friendly with Tory Eric Forth, despite rough exchanges on the floor of the Parliament. The election itself took place in the middle of a Strasbourg session and many of the MEPs from both sides were at home campaigning.

An early warning sign was the loss by Labour of the safe working class seat of Bermondsey to Liberal Simon Hughes in February 1983. The saga surrounding this event fuelled Labour's splits. Right-wing and pro-market MP Bob Mellish had been in place since 1946 and was a Labour Chief Whip from 1969-76. He fell out with the left-wingers who progressively took over the constituency and were critical, not least due to his controversially taking up an unpaid position on the LDDC (London Dockland Development Council, then opposed by Labour in London). He decided not to stand again for Parliament, supporting right-winger John O'Grady, Leader of Southwark Council, to be his successor and leaving the party in August 1982. The constituency, highly controversially, selected young gay, left-wing activist Peter Tatchell instead, who was not supported by Michael Foot. Tatchell was supported by, but not part of Militant. After much argument and a second selection with the same result, Mellish took the Chiltern Hundreds, precipitating the by-election and supporting O'Grady as "Real Bermondsey Labour". (Mellish later joined the SDP and accepted a life Peerage in 1985. Tatchell was much later expelled from the Labour Party.)

The 1983 general election manifesto spoke about being "committed to withdrawal in an amicable and orderly way." It was a ghastly election just a month after local elections, with even Tony Benn losing his seat (he was to return to Parliament in March 1984 in the Chesterfield by-election.) Astonishingly, afterwards, Heffer in the Queen's Speech debate insisted that Labour Party policy in the general election had been correct. Two Militant MPs were elected – Terry Fields in Liverpool and David Nellist from

Coventry. Labour's manifesto has been famously characterised (originally by Gerald Kaufman) as being "the longest suicide note in history". The SDP Liberal Alliance won twenty-three seats and the SDP another six and Labour's share of the vote was even less than in 1979. Afterwards Foot resigned and Kinnock won the Leadership election against Heffer, Shore, and others. Hattersley won the Deputy post against Dunwoody, Davies and Meacher. Patricia Hewitt was the Leader's press secretary and Charles Clarke chief of staff, both later becoming government Ministers. Much has been written about this election in numerous other books and it will not be repeated here. It marked a turning point in morale and the beginnings of isolation for the far left. Kinnock scathingly referred to the policies at that time as "revolutionary pessimism".

Caborn, Rogers and Boyes were elected to the House of Commons; Clwyd followed in 1984 in a by-election. Rogers had also been due to fight a by-election following the death of an MP, but the election was called on the same date.

In the European Parliament the Conservative MEPs rubbed in their election victory. Sir Henry Plumb said that the British people wanted the Community to be a success, and Lady Elles claimed that over 70% of the British population had voted to remain in Europe.

At party conference that year Castle used her Leader's speech to warn of the European move to federalism, but also rounded on local parties who were not bothering to select candidates, saying "you had better get interested" because what was happening in Europe was affecting all our lives. She also pointed out the relevance to the home political situation, saying: "If... this party is forced into third place in terms of votes that could be a mortal blow for us, because we have become a third party instead of the alternative government... I beg you to wake up before it's too late and turn out and win next June." She acknowledged that some of the BLG were more in favour of the EEC than others, but were united in denouncing scandals and exposing the need for change.

The National Executive Report to conference in 1983 noted that "the EEC Study Group has been in abeyance over the year. Work on the specific implications of EEC withdrawal has been conducted by other sub committees and it was intended before the election that the study group would meet subsequently to draw these together. The EEC Liaison Committee recently began meeting again to assist in the coordination of the campaign for the 1984 elections." The MEPs' Report said: "The result of the general election means that Britain will remain a member of the EC for the next few years. This makes it all the more vital that Labour should have a bigger voice in the EP."

After Neil Kinnock became Leader the position on Europe slowly began to soften, Kinnock having put support for the EC in his election manifesto for the leadership. The defeat of Benn for the Deputy Leadership split the left and this is when the Campaign Group was formed, as a harder line faction than the Tribune Group. It was to play a large part in the splits in the BLG in the next electoral period.

Moving on

Kinnock recognized that the 1983 election was the last that Labour could

fight on an anti- EEC platform. He wanted to demonstrate that the inward looking and self-obsessed past was not good and that the party should look at the way comrades did things on the continent. The thrust of his policy was that Labour should fit Britain to the world of 2010 and not that of 1945. He was also aware that talk of exchange controls could not work in the face of international technological advances. A party campaign briefing (Number 31) in November 1983 said: "The European elections next year give socialists the chance to offer common solutions to the problems we share. Action by individual governments will not be enough. We must work with our allies in a Europe-wide crusade for jobs." Peace and justice were also seen as areas for cooperation. An NEC statement at the 1983 autumn conference said Britain had to remain in the EEC for the term of the next Parliament and fight within it "for the best deal for Britain" and "to retain the option of withdrawal." Clwyd claims some credit for working on Kinnock to change his earlier opposition to the EEC when she spoke to him at a miners' rally in Cardiff, as does Castle in private chats. However any formal attempt to reverse the withdrawal policy at the 1983 conference was bound to fail as most of the large unions were still bound by withdrawal policies, so the officials did their best to keep the subject off the agenda.

When the Socialist Group met in Paris in late 1983, David Lowe arranged a side meeting between Kinnock and Charles Clarke and Lionel Jospin and Axel Queval of the French Socialist Party secretariat. They had rugby in common. Kinnock is said to have assured Jospin: "If I have one clear ambition as Leader of the Labour Party it is to drag it out of fifteen years of isolationism and put it back in the mainstream of European politics". Kinnock, as the new Labour Party Leader, spoke to the Group meeting and stressed his commitment to "a genuine dialogue between the British Labour and the other Socialist parties of Europe". This was received happily by the continentals and was seen as having put down a marker for a future change of policy. It was also a relief to the Labour staff in Europe. Gupwell enthused that this first speech was "a breath of fresh air. It was refreshing and wonderful". Clarke says that Kinnock believed that engagement was the right course.

A modification in the NEC's post general election stocktaking statement "Campaigning for a Fairer Britain" said:

"Britain will remain a member of the EEC for the term of the next European Parliament, and Labour will fight to get the best deal for Britain within it. At the end of that time Britain will have been a member of the EEC for 15 years – and this will be reflected in our pattern of trade, the way our economy works and our political relations overseas. But we also recognize the fundamental nature of the changes we wish to see made in the EEC and that its rules may stand in the way of a Labour government when it acts to cut unemployment. It is in this context that we believe that Britain, like all member states, must retain the option of withdrawal from the EEC."

This was accepted by conference as part of a large document, with no specific discussion on this section of the text. David Wilkinson, a pro-European academic working at the Labour Party during the European election campaign, says that the document's phrasing proved remarkably effective in preventing the party from tearing itself apart during the election campaign. Only Bob Cryer in Sheffield and Les Huckfield in Merseyside

East disputed the status of the new formulation and issued their own anti-market leaflets.

The Socialist Group organized a conference in Strasbourg in September 1983 entitled National-Socialism and Resistance. The aim was to make a public stand against the right-wing parties that were gathering strength for the next election campaign. Whilst the conference focused on Nazism and the Second World War, it also included a contribution from former British trade union leader Jack Jones on the Spanish Civil War. There was a good attendance from socialist parties all over Europe. The British Labour Party sent a solid delegation – Joan Lestor, former MP, Dan Jones from the trades councils, Saiyad Shah, a lawyer, Frank Ward from the Fabian Society and its General Secretary Ian Martin, plus Virendra Sharma, Susan Reeves and David Ward from the Labour Party. From the BLG there were Buchan and Castle – an unlikely partnership. It is not at all clear how this choice of representation came about. Obviously Castle was Leader. Collins as Deputy may have been busy with environmental work, while Rogers as Secretary was by that time an MP, as was the Chair, Caborn. Buchan had a strong history of opposition to fascism and was keen to be the representative. This was a policy area on which there was no disagreement across borders and a clear feeling that socialist co-operation and a show of solidarity was a good thing.

Early in 1983 a cross-party group on the right formed the Kangaroo Group, so named because it supported the notion of the Single Market – hopping over borders. The main characters behind this were Basil de Ferranti for the Conservatives and Karl von Wogau of the EPP. Labour MEPs were not generally seen in this grouping in the early days as it was largely seen as a big business mouthpiece.

One of the many public rows about MEPs' expenses surfaced during 1983. There had been allegations of rules being bent by some Irish Members and President Dankert, operating on the Socialist ticket of transparency, demanded a review of the system, saying the Parliament had a "chaotic accountancy system". Under this impetus the Bureau agreed that MEPs would have to attend half the sessions or forfeit secretarial allowances.

Castle always felt that it would be a good thing to make comparisons between the UK and various aspects of life in the Common Market and in February 1984 the BLG took an advertisement in *New Socialist* showing a batch of unfavourable comparisons between the UK and most EC countries in all sorts of subjects, not least VAT. Certainly the comparisons existed, but it is mystifying clear why Castle felt this would be a good start to an election campaign.

In March 1984 Labour MEPs held a lengthy meeting in Luxembourg at the time of the Group and Confederation Congress, about a document offering a range of options on reorganization of the staff, emanating from Castle's working party on the Socialist Group Bureau. That paper had been taken to a subcommittee of the Labour NEC's International Committee by Caborn and a further paper had been prepared by Gupwell and Harris from the staff for debate. The proposal included plans to increase staff working for the BLG and for these staffers to be paid for by the Group out of its general budget. The thinking was that this group of employees would operate separately to other national groups and that it should be decided by the newly-elected BLG after June. There was, however, concern about there being one

set of staff on European pay rates and another on Labour Party scales. The view was that new staff could be managed by BLG officers and would be able to help MEPs with their work in Brussels and Strasbourg where they currently felt the Socialist Group staff was not sufficiently supportive of their special needs. Castle always felt the BLG “were being robbed” in terms of lack of support by staffers of other nationalities and other opinions on the EEC. The reality was that the Socialist Group staff worked on committee lines, rather than in support of specific national delegations. Collins disagreed with Castle’s proposals that Socialist Group staff should be reorganized to service national groups. The general principles of the new system of extra support were finally agreed, as ever by a small margin and this was to be the precursor of a more formal and better-funded BLG office.

Meanwhile back in the Parliament

Parliament offered Members a subsidy to bring groups of visitors from their constituencies to Strasbourg or Brussels once or twice a year. It slowly caught on and MEPs would ask colleagues from other countries to give talks to them. Once she had seen it in operation, Castle eschewed the opportunity to avail herself of the system, saying “As soon as the visitors return home they are pro-market”. Buchan was another who was opposed to these visits. Hume was a particularly effective and inspirational speaker to such groups, outlining why the EEC was such an important institution in building and maintaining peace in Europe. A Labour-friendly Irishman, Niall O’Neill, was the Parliament official in charge and he, too, made witty and informative speeches supporting Members.

Claude Cheysson, venerable former Commissioner, had become Foreign Minister in the French government and would attend many parliamentary sessions for the Presidency. He had been friends with Buchan’s husband Norman and Janey Buchan recalls that he came across the floor and gave her a hug on his first appearance for the Council. He was to come back to the Socialist Group as an MEP in 1989.

In February 1984 Gallagher made a rare explanation of vote on the preliminary draft Treaty on European Union. He said that “as the only representative of the UK Social Democrat-Liberal Alliance I will vote in favour.” He cited an opinion poll in the UK that week revealing the majority of voters would like this Parliament to have more control over Community affairs.

There was a fairly acrimonious debate in March 1984 about the parental leave directive. Conservatives hated the fact that Europe was producing equalities legislation that was binding in the UK and flew in the face of Thatcherism. Shelagh Roberts was the rapporteur and steered a tricky line between the enthusiastic support from committee and her own party’s opposition. Unsurprisingly, the Conservatives voted against the proposals, thus offering Labour a useful campaigning point for the June elections.

In April Castle was battling again opposing milk proposals, harmonization of taxation on wine and attempts to put VAT on food. A deal was struck to cut milk production but she was unconvinced that it was sufficient to solve the problems and was goaded by Conservative Commissioner Christopher Tugendhat, who said that “Mrs Castle was getting up a fine head of steam for the elections and the contest should be worth watching”.

She was doubly furious at having stayed until midnight in expectation of a vote that did not take place until the Friday by which point she had given up and caught the plane home.

In May, the final month before the European election, very few Labour Members were present, mostly having gone home to campaign, but a reasonable bunch of Tories remained on deck for some reports including a directive on equal treatment of women. Castle felt it was important to be seen there right to the end, and Enright managed a characteristically brave comment saying he would retable a request for urgency on a motion to enable miners' families to receive subventions from the surplus food stocks when he returned in July as the new Member for Kent East. It was not, of course, to be the case. Quin was making demands about the crisis in the ship building industry right up to the last. The final BLG speaker of the parliament was industrious Adam, on energy and procurement issues in the budget.

There was not a lot of report-writing by the BLG Members during this term, probably due to the ambivalent position of the Group. Adam produced some opinions from the Energy and Research Committee for the budget, Boyes reported on workers' democracy and unemployment, Enright on Spanish and Portuguese accession, Namibia and development food aid, Griffiths on regional funding, Quin on New Zealand butter, several on fisheries and on economic matters, Collins on seal pups and lead in petrol, Rogers on gas and Megahy wrote an opinion on competition policy. Key did a report in the early days for Budget Control on the Commission's expenses and allowances, and an opinion on air transport deregulation, Clwyd an opinion on accession of Spain and Portugal. The others, whilst all vocal in debates and tablers of questions and amendments, did not take part in the formal amending of legislation.

After hours

Labour Members were held back to some extent by their lack of linguistic ability, and tended to socialise mostly amongst themselves, with some fraternizing with the English interpreters and only a minority venturing to spend time with other nationalities. Joyce Quin speaks of a Francophone "Amigo group" run by Jacques Delors where she and Enright, being linguists, felt amongst friends. Rogers, who spoke a little French and Italian, found friendship with some of the German members.

The historic Metropole Hotel in Brussels, which had been the headquarters for the Nazis during WWII, was the staging post of a number of the Labour Group, and Members such as gregarious raconteur Megahy would hold court in the bar in the early evenings surrounded by friends such as Seal and Lomas, and often MEPs from other countries.

It was not only language that caused some problems for our merry band, but currency exchange rates also managed to create some confusion. Francs in Strasbourg and francs in Brussels were very different in value. Megahy and Enright recall drinking a fine bottle of Chateau d'Yquem one night in Brussels, and were bemused to be complimented on their taste by a passing Italian colleague. They had not realized its quality and they thought the cost was about £6 but were embarrassed and horrified when it turned out to be almost ten times that much.

In general, as an SPD staffer put it, “the Brits didn’t socialise much with ‘Europeans’”. There was even a feeling that some BLG Members felt that a pro-European attitude might be catching should they be in too much contact with colleagues from across the Channel. It is impossible to underestimate the damage to good relations that was done over the years by the blunt and impolite approach of some of the Labour Members. On the continent colleagues greet each other politely and exchange pleasantries. Labour Members would often completely blank Socialist staff members as if they did not exist. This caused great offence and is still remembered decades later by some individuals.

Some of the Labour Members had been introduced by earlier Assembly members to an unpretentious restaurant in Strasbourg near the station where simple fare such as steak frites was served. *L’Orient’s* fortunes were transformed as its humble back room became a regular eating place for the left, largely the BLG plus Hume, interpreters, staff and friends. This became a convivial default eating place for those with no other engagement, including Castle whose hotel was within walking distance so that she could totter back on foot. After much red wine late at night, left-wing and Scottish folk songs and Irish rebel songs sometimes rang out at “Bang the Bells” (as the place became known). Collins’ fine voice could be heard on many occasions and Hume was fond of singing “The Town I Love so Well” in a manner that could bring tears to the eyes. Some Dutch, Danish and Irish Members would also join in. Hume was amongst others who joined in the singing at a Socialist Group meeting in Venice when they celebrated Castle’s birthday and he sang a beautiful song “You stole my heart away...”

Castle decided in 1982 that the time had come for the BLG to extend the hand of friendship more positively to the Socialist Group and she persuaded them to hold a Christmas party for friends in the Group. For a few years these were to become popular events, held in the house of a friendly member of the Socialist Group staff, Kriek Basile. Part of this was Castle’s desire to showcase British food, so goods such as York ham and Norfolk turkey were brought over in a car from London by Jan Royall, who was effectively the BLG’s general secretary. Irish smoked salmon was imported by Hume via the good offices of an Irish driver and carved expertly by Prescott who would come as a guest in his role as a former Leader. There was always plenty of whisky from the duty free, and some long term cross-border friendships were forged. This was before climate change, and British wine was not considered best to inflict on the comrades. On one occasion Royall and Castle’s assistant Pollack had an event-filled and much-delayed journey home in a blizzard when the car broke down more than once and finally the windscreen wipers packed up. Their main concern was to get back to the office in Queen Anne’s Gate before it closed on Friday evening so as to pack their papers for the following week’s Strasbourg session. Sheer determination got them there in the nick of time.

Most of the Members took advantage of the generous parliamentary scheme for learning languages and often included an intensive week or two in their holidays, sometimes with families in tow. Marie Therese Schmidt was the main French teacher and Maria Jose Quintela Goncalves took Spanish. These provided good opportunities to begin to make friends with other MEPs, including those from other parties. Some benefitted rather

more than others from these courses. Castle took both French and German courses and worked hard at her vocabulary. In particular she said she wanted to be “fluent enough in German to be able to swear at Rudi Arndt”, being already fluent in French.

Political groups in the Parliament normally meet in Brussels, but once or twice a year the Socialist Group would embark on Study Days in another country, on the grounds that it was useful to better understand the various political systems, visit projects and sometimes coinciding with local, regional or national election campaigns. They were often timetabled in tandem with Congress meetings of the Confed, so that the Socialist Group could offer interpretation facilities for those meetings. These visits, lasting the best part of a week or more, offered better opportunities for socializing. There was normally at least one major dinner for the entire group, with speeches translated into French, English and German and visits to interesting projects. Attendance by the BLG at these events was variable, but some of the most anti-market Members were amongst those who thoroughly enjoyed the experience, and even the hangovers. Several Members mentioned a trip to Montpellier in September 1983 where there was a boat trip in glorious weather and Tom Megahy, Barbara Castle, Alf Lomas and Gordon Adam did their bit to drink the boat dry. One of the most ardent anti-marketeers later ventured that there was a lot of fun to be had during the days when Paolo Falcone was General Secretary of the Group, but that it was much more austere later on when Pauline Green took over.

One other traditional event was the “Asparagus Feast” held in May courtesy of the Chambers of Commerce of the Regional Councils in the tourist areas of the Bas-Rhin near Strasbourg. Famous for their excellent white asparagus, and seizing a good opportunity to flag up their local produce, they would transport busloads of Members, staff and journalists, to mar-quees in a picturesque village where seemingly limitless quantities of Riesling and asparagus were downed and dancing took place to the tune of local traditional brass bands in a spirit of great bonhomie. Barbara Castle always enjoyed a dance at these events even if the only partner she could find was a Tory.

Most of the Members report eventually becoming friendly with at least some colleagues on their parliamentary committees, particularly the Germans, Dutch and Greeks who could speak English.

Not a sisterhood

Labour’s four women Members could not have been more different from one another. Nor were they a close band, all of them being in their own way to some extent loners. Castle managed to have poor relations with each of them except Quin, whilst Buchan succeeded in alienating them all at one time or another. Clwyd ploughed her own field with an eye to the home media and the future. They were all childless except Janey Buchan, whose son was an adult.

Ann Clwyd, a former *Guardian* and BBC journalist, who we have seen changed her mind on the EEC half way through, beat off criticism of her stance and still managed to get selected for a safe Westminster seat, winning a by-election just before the 1984 election, at much the same time as her friend

Roland Boyes, on whom she did a fairly good job of beginning to convert to a pro-market position. Clwyd had tried to win selection for the Rhondda; she was beaten by Allan Rogers, but was then successful for the Cynon Valley by-election. She remains an MP today and says she thoroughly enjoyed her years as an MEP and valued the international comradeship, though confesses she did not manage too well with languages. She enjoyed going on peace marches with friends from Greece and Italy. She says that Buchan did not speak to her for years after her change of stance on the EEC.

Barbara Castle always refused to have anything to do with women's committees but was nevertheless a powerful role model for women as the only MEP most people in Britain had heard of. As Secretary of State for Social Security she had been responsible for the Equal Pay Act and has been commemorated on a stamp of six famous socialist women for that achievement. Having been a Secretary of State during the Wilson governments and former MP for Blackburn she entered the Parliament at the age of nearly 70 and retired at just on 80 to the House of Lords where she continued to campaign, this time for pensioners. She spoke French and German and enjoyed the challenge of language courses. She was anti-market but softened her views in 1982.

Joyce Quin, the youngest, supported her North East constituency by working hard on "fish and ships". As the only female politician in the North East she was given fairly good media coverage in the region. A linguist and former lecturer, she took an active part in working on good relations with other Group Members, particularly the French. Always pro-market, she became a Europe Minister, then Agriculture Minister in the Blair government and then went into the House of Lords, having resigned her Commons seat in the hope of standing for the planned North East Regional Assembly but was thwarted by the failure of the referendum to set up such a body.

Janey Buchan, a Glaswegian socialist interested in working class culture, did not undertake any reports during her term of office. A woman of very strong views and high principles, she and Castle did not get on at all and often traded insults. Buchan maintained she was pro-Europe but anti-market. She was keenly aware of the need for the BLG to have a London office and maintain close relations with the party headquarters and Parliament. She was a strong supporter of the UK staff during her years as a Member and a long-term doughty campaigner against apartheid and for gay rights.

Their socialist colleague Marijke van Hemeldonck tells of a group of socialist feminists who went to Ireland during the election campaign in 1984 with suitcases full of contraceptives, though none of the British women were part of this crusade to try and break the ban on contraception in Ireland.

Despite the rise of the Women's Action Committee (WAC) in the Labour Party since 1981 and the struggle for power for the women's organization and women's conference, there was still an inbuilt tendency for selection bodies to vote for the male Leader of the Council rather than a woman. This under-representation was evident for some time to come. There was no such thing as an all-women shortlist at the time.

The supporting cast

Jan Royall was hired in January 1979 before the election as a coordinator of

the Group working in London out of the BLG office, becoming general secretary in all but name for the new Labour Group. Her stipend was paid out of a monthly contribution by all the Members. Those from the North, who almost never passed by London, constantly quibbled about this cost and were always trying to have the post abolished. She recalls that every month she was fearful of not having a job, but lasted until December 1985 before leaving to work in Kinnock's private office. When Labour Party salaries were increased Caborn was proud of his successful attempt at last to obtain a pay rise to get her on the Labour Party pay scale and a proper contract and pension. Jan spoke several European languages and was a fine behind-the-scenes interlocutor for the BLG with their European comrades. She stoically tolerated some MEPs who treated her as a personal assistant.

Members set up staffed offices in their constituencies in a variety of ways. Some were offered offices in town halls, whilst others preferred Labour or trade union premises and a few set up space in their homes or hired rooms. Castle did not have a constituency office, preferring to use the Leader's privilege to make a base in the Parliament Information Office in London for herself and her researcher, together with a secretary who came in to her private home at Hell Corner Farm in Buckinghamshire. Rates of pay for assistants conformed to no particular scale and there were substantial discrepancies. It was not until offices were more settled in Europe and parliamentary power had increased to the extent that committee work became important that MEPs started hiring staff in Brussels.

Michael Wood was the first Briton to be recruited to the Parliament by the Open Competition system, joining in 1974. He had worked for Prescott when he was Leader of the Labour Group in the Assembly; he took leave of absence to work for the election and afterwards went to work in the Parliament. David Lowe, who had worked at the Labour Party, joined the Parliament in 1982 and went to work in the Cabinet of Piet Dankert, then Socialist President of the Parliament. He also wrote a regular column in *Tribune* about the French Socialist Party and remains on the staff.

In the Socialist Group, the British administrators had been recruited before direct elections and were all pro-EEC. David Blackman, an academic and former classics scholar, had been there some time and was a Deputy General Secretary of the Socialist Group. It was not easy to find Labour staff with the requisite language skills to become official staff members of the Parliament. Dick Gupwell had been appointed in 1976 during the time when Gwyneth Dunwoody was active on Labour's NEC International Committee and met her approval because of his entertainment industry trade union background. He recalls on one occasion completely drying up when challenged by a group of young German and Irish visitors to explain Labour's withdrawal policy on which he had strong reservations. Geoff Harris had to await a later chance for recruitment because his strong federalist views were strenuously opposed by the formidable Dunwoody, although he worked closely with the Labour delegation in the former Parliamentary Assembly. Carole Tongue, who served as an MEP from 1984-99, had started work as a secretary to Blackman after an earlier parliamentary stagiaireship. Rather less well known to Members was Roy Cattermole who was involved in the general administration section. A senior Irish administrator with a keen mind, Fionnulla Richardson, was also highly rated by many of the British.

She was always supportive of those Members keen to advance the aims of the Group.

Left-wingers in the BLG were constantly irritated by these pro-Europeans with their more centrist or right-wing views (not to mention the fact they were better paid than the Members) and spent some time grumbling in BLG meetings that the British members of the Socialist Group staff should work to them and not to the General Secretary of the Group. It was late in the second Parliament before this difficulty was quietly buried.

Julian Priestley, a long-standing Labour member and strong pro-European, began working in the Parliament in June 1973 originally on a temporary contract when the Parliament was looking for someone to assist a British rapporteur for the budget. By 1984 he was on the permanent staff and running the secretariat of the Energy, Research and Technology Committee, and later that of the Budgets and Internal Market. He was to become a senior figure in the Parliament in the ensuing twenty-five years and retired in 2007 with a knighthood.

The Socialist Group had set aside a staff member to look after the British Members, even during the Assembly times. Kriek Basile, a Belgian woman, had a large informal office-cum-lounge room in which they could come and take a cup of coffee, read the newspapers and receive advice about parliamentary procedures. Even more important, she offered help about how to deal with landlords, install TVs in apartments and the small details of life in a foreign country. She was popular, particularly with those whose French was not highly developed. It was at her private house that the BLG held its Christmas parties. She was particularly fond of Prescott from the former Assembly and Lomas, Megahy and Seal, who for some years would visit her for barbecues in the summer.

Socialist parties in Europe

What was clear after the difficulties of developing a platform for the first European Parliament election in 1979 was that the national parties were just that and were set on fighting elections on the basis of national issues. In June 1979 former Confed Secretary-General Michel suggested that the parties must ask themselves whether they were prepared to give the Confederation greater powers. In 1980 the theme of the Congress was "Socialists against the Right". However it was clear that the Confed at that stage had no intention of becoming a European super-party.

The next two years saw four special conferences: in London in March 1981 on energy, in Paris in March on security and disarmament, in Madrid in November on enlargement, and in Marseilles in June 1982 on Mediterranean policy. Much support was given to Felipe Gonzalez in recognition of his contribution to freedom and democracy in Spain. The Greek, Spanish and Portuguese socialist parties had been involved in the work of the Confederation from the end of the 1970s. The congress in November that year in Paris was on the theme "Socialists and European Revival". The idea was to develop a theme for the 1984 elections on a European economic recovery plan. Lessons were learned from 1979 and national parties were left to organize their own campaign conferences.

Labour MEPs were not normally considered by the NEC to be delegates

to the Confederation meetings, in contrast to the position of many of the other parties. It was seen very much as the province of the International Committee of the NEC and the International Department of the Labour Party. There was very little continuity of elected MPs attending and the British did not have any Member on the Bureau until 1985. There was also virtually no linkage about topics, debates, or results of the deliberations between the European wing of the party and its bureaucracy at home.

Reselection battles

Such was the divided state of the Labour Party that talk of reselections and deselections for MEPs was already on the agenda at the beginning of 1983 for an election that was not due until the middle of 1984. The disunity and sheer bitterness between the pro and anti-EEC factions in the party frequently spilled over into the press during these eighteen months, inevitably adding to the negative image of Labour as a party at war with itself.

Even before the general election there had been a stormy meeting of the BLG over policy. In January Seal supported a Lomas resolution calling for all candidates to support the Labour Party manifesto promise of withdrawal. The vote tied 8-8. Caborn in the Chair, having voted for the resolution, did not give it a casting vote and it fell. Enright said: "My actions, my attendance and my work rate are the true proof of my loyalty to the party", and it was the case that he was constantly present and active in the Parliament.

At the same meeting Collins managed to have a proposal carried saying that "as far as possible candidates should be selected using the same procedures as those for the Westminster Parliament." There was copious coverage in the Scottish and Sheffield press and rumours began to circulate that anti-marketeters in the party were seeking to unseat as many as nine of the seventeen MEPs. The *Sheffield Morning Telegraph* in January criticized Key and suggested the NUM were organizing to ditch him, which was the case. The second safest Labour European seat was a plum target for a miners' candidate.

Kelvingrove Labour Party (in Buchan's constituency) passed a resolution demanding that panels of candidates should be loyal to conference decisions and the party's NEC. This went to Labour's Scottish Conference in March. Easter's Co-operative Party Conference in 1983 also passed a withdrawal motion from their Women's Guild. Pressure was building. In February Collins' CLP called on him to support Labour Party policy on withdrawal, the request being moved by Adam Ingram, who was a candidate for Parliament. Collins promised them a speech and in due course gave a good and detailed argument and won support. (Ingram did not win a seat that time but was elected to Parliament for East Kilbride in June 1987, was for a time PPS to Neil Kinnock and became a government Minister.)

Janey Buchan was so vociferous in her criticism of the EEC that the Head of the European Commission office in Edinburgh early in 1983 refused to allow his staff to take part in a media programme with her. This then occasioned another row in the press.

Some Labour MEPs organized a series of rallies during 1983 against continuing Common Market membership. The first was held in London on

March 22, supported by trade unions, the Co-op and leading anti-market-teers.

The NEC held off opening the European selection process until after the 1983 general election. With Militant still active in many constituencies, and the right/left, pro-and anti-market positions still dividing local Labour parties, arguments were rife throughout the autumn of 1983 as reselection came uppermost in the minds of some activists. Selections were due to commence in September, and European selection organizations were constituted, but because of delays in completing boundary reviews, they did not begin work until December. There were even some late boundary decisions, with candidates having to be re-allocated in eleven constituencies.

Reselections for Labour MEPs were to be made even more complicated by boundary changes necessitated by aligning with the earlier changes in boundaries of Westminster seats. Only six constituencies were totally unchanged, with another seven slightly changed. For the rest there was fairly substantial redrawing of boundaries and seat re-naming. Barbara Castle was dismayed to find her own constituency borders were changing and unnerved that she had to fight to be selected for Greater Manchester West, a seat containing only part of her former constituency, against some opposition from party members who were not happy with her perceived softening on Europe. She had attempted to be selected for that seat for the 1979 election but not been short-listed and it had been won by Conservative William Hopper with the tiny majority of 302 over Labour's candidate. In her former seat she was again opposed by Glyn Ford, who publicized her earlier promise only to stand for one term. She was spared having to confront him for selection by winning the other seat first. The fact that she did not visit her constituency very often was apparent when she told party workers she wanted to visit every factory in her constituency and was shocked to be told that "there are none left."

Derek Enright had originally won his selection by only one vote from John Gunnell (who later succeeded Merlyn Rees as MP for Morley and South Leeds). His agent in 1979 had been Geoff Hoon. Enright's wife Jane believes that there were Militants in some of the constituencies, but McGowan says he does not believe they were present amongst the 110 delegates at the selection meeting and that he was not in contact with them. Enright found himself squeezed between McGowan on the one hand and Colin Bergen (also now a Labour MP) on the other and was eliminated in the first ballot. McGowan had served as a Leeds City Councillor, a member of the Area Health Authority and Chair of the Community Health Council, had worked as Secretary of the Leeds Co-operative Party and development officer at the HQ of the Industrial Common Ownership Movement, was an active campaigner with CND and West Yorkshire coordinator for END.

Jane Enright suggests that in retrospect it may have not been the best tactic for Derek to have employed two ambitious Labour Councillors, who were busy with Council work rather than with the task of promoting the MEP. One of those, John Battle, was very talented and later went on himself to Westminster. There was no doubt that Labour lost a colourful character in Europe when Enright was deposed. A classic scholar whose ready wit and erudite puns and quotations often caused difficulties for the interpreters, he became known as the man who sang *Yellow Submarine* in Latin.

There appeared to have been little kudos for him in having obtained substantial ESF funds for his area and for being actively involved in persuading the Commission to set up a form of help for redundant mineworkers. Enright was asked to fight what was seen as a hopeless seat in Kent. With typical chutzpa, he gave it a vigorous campaign and managed to finish second behind the Tories, bucking the local and national trend and helping build up the party for victory a few years later.

Balfé's reselection suffered a slight hiccup when in January 1984 it was forced to begin again. In the re-run he won easily.

Brian Key was deselected in Yorkshire. Arthur Scargill's NUM had a large number of local union branches affiliated to displace Key in favour of his close confidant Norman West. Key, formerly Chair of Barnsley Labour Group, had originally beaten Martin Redmond in the selection in 1978. At that meeting, another NUM hopeful, Sir Jack Leyden, seen as the front runner, lost at the first ballot and saw that his votes transferred to Key rather than Redmond because of animosity to Scargill. This time Key's supporters were outnumbered and the NUM had its way. Key was out.

Michael Gallagher deselected himself by joining the SDP prior to the 1984 election. One of the main concerns of the Labour Group was the fact that he was entitled to several thousands of pounds from the Socialist Group once he was outside the Labour delegation, and that he could use that for electoral purposes. Castle unhesitatingly slammed him (inaccurately) in the press and to the NEC as a "poor attender".

Another four of the Labour MEPs had been elected in 1983 to the House of Commons and did not stand again: Ann Clwyd, Roland Boyes, Richard Caborn and Allan Rogers. Selected when anti-EU sentiment was still strong in the winter of 1983-84, all of their successors were anti-marketeters. This swung the balance in the BLG against what was becoming the prevailing pragmatic wind and was to cause trouble in the period ahead.

Key and Enright, with typical dedication, were working and speaking in plenary sessions right up to the last, defending their Leader and continuing to speak up for progressive policies. Castle said about Enright and Key that "though hardworking and conscientious MEPs, they had fallen victim to the manoeuvrings of the hard left."

