



## Linda McAvan MEP Yorkshire and the Humber

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### Rio+20 Summit

Linda recently visited Settle in North Yorkshire to meet environment groups to discuss what the EU is doing to tackle climate change. Along with discussing the EU's attempts to cut its carbon emissions, Linda also explained how EU countries will approach the Rio+20 Summit later this month. The summit will bring together world leaders 20 years after the first Earth Summit. With the economy dominating the agenda, we must remind leaders that tackling sustainability is part and parcel of finding a way out of crisis. The EU will be arguing that by 2030 there should be universal access to drinking water; for the restoration of marine habitats by 2020, to eliminate illegal fishing and reduce marine litter; to increase the sustainability of ecosystems, land management and farming by 2030; to provide sustainable electricity for all; and to improve resource efficiency especially with regards to food.



### Hollande sparks Eurozone rethink

*It was ironic last week to see David Cameron in Berlin urging Angela Merkel to agree to further political integration in the Eurozone and a rethink of her austerity policies. As Britain slips into a double dip recession, it's a pity he hasn't given similar advice to George Osborne. But despite the U-turns and omni-shambles of recent weeks, the government has no plan B for the British economy which will mean further rises in unemployment and falls in living standards.*

*In the Eurozone, all eyes are once again on southern Europe this week, in particular Spain whose banks have just received a massive bailout, but also Greece where elections next Sunday will be crucial. Sunday also sees the second round in the French parliamentary elections. The left did well last weekend in round one and round two looks set to deliver a healthy parliamentary majority to the Parti Socialiste, consolidating François Hollande's grip on power. This is good news for the left and the Eurozone, since Hollande is calling into question the austerity programmes which are so damaging to Europe's economy.*



Merkel talks with Hollande

*So what needs to happen now? We need less blame and more intellectual honesty. We need those countries who have done well out of the Euro to recognise this and shoulder the responsibility for finding solutions. Because if we look across the Eurozone, we do not see an economic basket case, we see some countries, Germany in particular, benefitting from a single currency which has made their exports cheaper and their economies more competitive. François Hollande's idea is to effectively pool the Eurozone's debt by issuing Eurobonds. This makes sense. Whereas debt levels in some countries are unsustainable, taken as a whole, debt levels across the 17 Eurozone countries are manageable and Eurobonds would make borrowing cheaper for the weaker countries - so they could pay their own way out of the crisis rather than rely on bailouts.*

*As the EU prepares for another Summit later this month, Hollande has also made it clear that we need a plan for growth - not just a plan for cuts. He shares Labour's view that if you cut too far and too fast, throwing millions out of work and destroying businesses, you hamper not help recovery; people and companies pay less tax so governments need to borrow more. President Obama agrees and is putting pressure on Merkel to switch course. Fingers crossed she heeds the message and that our own government follows suit, and quickly. Linda*

### South Yorkshire Festival—July 7th

Linda will have a stall at the South Yorkshire Festival on Saturday July 7th held, as usual, at Wortley Hall. Please come over and say hello!

**Working in Europe for everyone in Yorkshire and the Humber**



## Tories snub pay gap

As mentioned in a previous ebulletin, despite equal pay legislation women are still paid less than men across the whole of the EU. Recognising this disparity, the European Parliament debated and passed a report calling on the European Commission to better enforce current equal pay legislation by introducing sanctions against offending employers. These would include fines for employers not paying equally and excluding offenders from public benefits or state subsidies. The report also urged the Commission to require more transparency from employers with how they set and negotiate pay. Regular mandatory audits into pay levels were also suggested. The majority of Tory MEPs voted against more transparency over salaries and all but one abstained from the final vote, a damning indictment of Conservative attitudes to equal pay.

## Mobile rates reduced

Updated EU rules will mean using a mobile phone in another EU country will once more get cheaper in time for the summer holidays. Since 2007 caps on the amount mobile phone companies can charge for using a mobile phone in another EU country have been slashed by 70%. Before the caps came in it could cost up to a £1 a minute to receive a call in some EU countries and 50p to send a text message. From July 1st it will cost 7p a minute to receive a call and 7p to send a text message. Making calls is cut to 24p a minute and data is capped at 40p per 1MB.

## Irish say yes

The Irish referendum on whether to accept the EU fiscal pact was passed with a comfortable majority of just over 60% when the country went to the polls in at the end of May. The pact means Ireland will now have to meet tough economic rules which demand budget deficits of 0.5% of economic output, a target it would have missed by some distance this year.

## Robin Hood tax hits difficulties

The European Financial Transaction Tax (FTT), or "Robin Hood" tax remains on the European Parliament's agenda, but several difficulties must first be overcome before it can become law. One major barrier is that all tax policies, unlike other EU policy areas, need the unanimous support of governments and the ConDem government has said it would veto any proposal for the 27 countries. But there are emerging differences among MEPs on how the tax would work in practice and where the proceeds would go. Labour MEPs support the original concept behind the Robin Hood tax: that the money be directed towards priorities like tackling youth unemployment and fighting climate change, as well as investing more in international development. But some MEPs are now arguing that the tax should be used to help fund the EU budget - something Labour MEPs believe is a non starter since EU law leaves tax levying and collection to national governments. Angela Merkel and François Hollande are both still saying they want the tax to go ahead and are exploring the option of a Eurozone only tax, or a "coalition of the willing". Labour MEPs believe we need the financial services industry, which currently enjoys an annual VAT exemption of around £18billion, to pay its fair share of tax and will keep the pressure on for action at national and European level.



Labour MEPs in Robin Hood tax fight

## Child Labour in the cocoa industry

Linda marked World Fair Trade day by hosting an event in the European Parliament to raise awareness of the extent of child labour in the west African cocoa industry. In 2009 it is estimated that 1.8million children were employed in the cocoa sector, often in dangerous and physically exhausting manual work. Worse, many of these children are not helping on the family farm, as some chocolate companies would have us believe, but are trafficked to work in the farms and paid little but their bed and board. But it's too simple to blame the cocoa farmers when the price paid to them for cocoa has fallen 30% in recent years. Linda wants to see major chocolate companies pay a fair price to farmers and do more to monitor working conditions on the farms who supply their cocoa. We as individuals can help combat child labour by buying Fair Trade and helping to guarantee better working standards and higher wages for the people working on cocoa farms.

## Linda at Regional Conference

Linda spoke at the Yorkshire & Humber Labour Party Regional Conference in Bradford about the Euro crisis, her work over the past year on the environment and public health and the issue of a referendum. She also chaired a Labour Movement for Europe fringe event and took questions from Labour Party members.