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WORKING FOR A FAIRER EUROPE

The European Union was founded on the principles of respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality and respect for human rights. The European Union is unique and has rightly been described as 'the most successful peace process in history', emerging from two World Wars and a Holocaust.

We all benefit from a progressive EU in which Member States work together to create international solutions to solve international problems. A progressive EU is crucial in building a new Social Europe that is prepared to tackle new global challenges and give people a fairer deal.

Each and every one of us has been given the opportunity to shape the Scotland in Europe that we want on June 4th 2009 and the dividing lines are clear. A Socialist group puts the people, not the market, first. For many years, Labour in Europe has championed the cause of workers' rights, the local environment and keeping our children safe. We all want a safer Scotland, with higher living standards, decent and stable work and a clean and safe environment. The Socialist group in the European Parliament are constantly striving to achieve this and we will continue to fight toward that end.

Today we face a number of global challenges. These are challenges that neither Scotland nor the UK can face alone. The turmoil in the global markets has revealed the true importance of European co-operation and co-ordination.

Working across Europe to find solutions to the economic and financial crisis is crucial. The EU is the world's largest international single market and has the ability to be a leader in innovation and new technologies. To date, billions of pounds from EU national governments have been pumped into the rescue effort. Efforts to reduce climate change are creating new jobs all over the world and there is a great potential that Scotland and the UK at large will benefit from new energy and climate change targets. Creating new green jobs will help to re-launch the economy by creating smart green growth and jobs.

As part of the Socialist Group of the European Parliament, Labour has achieved much more for the people of Scotland than what could have been done alone. The strength and unity of the group has meant that there have been a number of victories, particularly in the field of social protection and workers rights. The Party of European Socialists Manifesto calls for the revision of the Viking, Lavall and Ruffert cases. European Court of Justice judgements in the Viking, Lavall and Ruffert cases undermined Social Europe by giving higher priority to the freedom of movement over the right of both UK and other EU workers.

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Many of our achievements are bitterly opposed by the Conservatives, UKIP and the SNP, but Labour are determined to continually fight for social justice and protect people from exploitation. During the current negotiations on working time, Labour MEPs supported limiting the length of time workers can be obliged to work, to a maximum of 48 hours per week. If finally agreed, the new legislation will mean that workers, who until now had only been allowed to do an average of 48 hours per week over four months, will be able to average that over a year, thus increasing flexibility. Furthermore, it took a Labour government to sign Britain up to the Social Chapter, which gives workers guaranteed paid holidays, the same rights for part-time and temporary agency workers as those enjoyed by full-time employees, and better maternity and paternity rights. If Britain had not signed up to the Social Chapter – as the Conservatives wanted – British workers would be some of the least protected people in the whole of Europe.

The European elections this June are vital. Labour has achieved so much for Scotland but so much more can still be achieved. We will continue to fight for the regulation of the financial markets at European and global levels, a stronger voice for workers' in tackling climate change and a proper balance between Europe's social and economic goals.

It is not the time to turn back the clocks, but a time for a strong, progressive EU that will champion the rights' of its citizens.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Stihler MEP
Labour MEP for Scotland.

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