



For immediate use 8 December 2004

Press Release

New Labour Blocks Agreement on Better Working Hours

Call for MEP to be named so investigation can be considered

SNP and Plaid Cymru MEPs have criticised the New Labour Government for blocking moves to phase in a better deal on working hours for UK workers. Talks to try to resolve differences over the 48 hour working week broke up without agreement in Brussels last night when a small number of member states including the UK rejected a compromise measure put forward by the European Commission. The UK Government wants to retain its opt out from rules to make sure workers aren't exploited by being forced to work more than 48 hours a week.

Speaking from Brussels, Plaid Cymru Deputy Leader Jill Evans MEP said:

"Few will be surprised at the failure to reach agreement on working hours. Once again this confirms that New Labour's loyalties lie not with hard working people but with their friends in big business.

There was a real opportunity here to combat the exploitation of workers by unscrupulous employers - that opportunity has now been squandered and the blame lies squarely at the door of the Labour government. This is clearly not a party concerned with defending workers' rights."

SNP Euro-MP Alyn Smith MEP, a member of the Parliament's Regional Development Committee added:

"This is New Labour showing their true colours. The TUC put it very well when they said that the British government's tack has been to play down the health and safety advantage of the limit whilst 'greatly exaggerating the business need for long hours'.

Of course we understand the need for flexibility and exemptions in certain special cases, but there can be no excuse for blocking this legislation to combat worker exploitation. Whilst other member states were looking for a

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ALYN SMITH MEP

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way forward, the UK Government has once again adopted a hard line approach which is thoroughly unconstructive."

Note

The Dutch EU Presidency was looking for a compromise on the issue. Some governments were understood to favour the opt out for the 48 hour maximum working week being phased out over time or at least considering other options. The UK wants the opt out to stay.

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