

# Nature needs the EU too

Anita Pollack on the environmental case for the EU

**T**here are plenty of good reasons for staying in the EU, but environmental protection is high on the list. The old cliché that environment knows no borders remains true. The best way to meet today's multiple environmental challenges is by co-operating with our near neighbours. What better way to do that than as part of the EU? Whether it concerns water, air or waste, EU legislation leads to improvements in standards and protection that affect you and me and the birds and bees.

Records of Conservative governments show they would not

attain such high standards without EU pressure. As Mary Creagh MP, chair of the House of Commons Environment Audit Committee points out: 'Anyone who thinks the environment will be better off if we left the EU should take a long hard look at the Tory record'. And if we leave, we will still need to implement EU environment law but without a seat at the table and a vote in decisions. Why should we walk away from this?

Europe remains a huge force for environmental protection. If we are serious about implementing the Paris Climate Change Accord we can only do it through



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organisations like the European Union. European co-operation played a key role in securing the Paris deal. Alan Johnson MP, leading Labour's campaign for the UK to stay in Europe, points out that 'if you look at where all the climate change deniers are, largely... they're in the Out campaign'.

Policies such as the Birds and Habitats Directive have protected our natural environment for years. More technical legislative initiatives from the EU dealing with large combustion plants, air pollution and pesticides, protect our health. Bathing and drinking water directives do both. Without EU standards on recycling and renewables Britain would be lagging behind in our commitment to renewable energy.

## Beneficial

The RSPB, one of Britain's largest and most respected environmental organisations, has no doubt that being in the EU is beneficial. They say that climate change is an obvious policy where EU co-operation has led to agreements, but also that we can only manage our alien species, fish stocks, air quality, carbon emissions, biodiversity and much more by actively engaging with the countries around us and setting out the frameworks that we can all work towards.

We would, however, be deluding ourselves if we were to suggest that all is perfect in EU-land. Noxious air emissions, over-use of pesticides, lack of progress in banning both neonicotinoids that are killing bees and endocrine disrupting chemicals, compliance with the Paris Accord on climate change, how best to advance the UN Sustainable Development goals for 2030: these and plenty of other problems all demand a better vision for the European environment. This is something the Left should be promoting. We should remember that the EU Council and Parliament currently have a right-wing majority. This needs to change if we want to see real progress in the future. But progressives need to engage within the EU, not criticise it from the outside.

### 4 Myth 4: 'EU migrants are a drain on the economy'

EU migrants contribute much more in taxes than they claim in benefits, only 5% actually claim unemployment benefit. It is estimated that migrants have contributed over £20bn from 2001-2011. The real problem is exploitation by unscrupulous employers - something that the UK Government has refused to tackle.

### 5 Myth 5: 'The EU does nothing to help ordinary people'

Hundreds of thousands of our members' jobs directly depend on our membership of the EU and many of our most important employment rights originate with EU legislation. The EU has ensured safe working hours, introduced the right to paid annual leave and the right to parental leave.

### 6 Myth 6: 'Our most important markets are China and the US, not the EU'

Half of Britain's exports go to the EU, accounting for some 3.5 million jobs. The UK sells more to the Netherlands alone than to the whole of China.

### 7 Myth 7: 'The European Court of Human Rights forces its will on the UK'

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) is nothing to do with the EU, it is an entirely separate institution. But, the ECHR is there to protect everyone not just the privileged few. Its rulings have helped to advance LGBT rights, improve child protection laws and give victims of the Thalidomide scandal access to justice.

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The biggest myth of all is that workers will somehow be better off outside of the EU

This is the reality of the referendum - our membership of the EU is hugely important for fundamental employment rights in the UK and Unite members depend on the jobs and investment that our membership of the EU brings.

There is work to be done to make a better Europe. But we can only do this together with sister unions across the continent if we stay in

That is why Unite are clear

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