

briefing

European Parliamentary Labour Party

A Better Deal for Consumers

British people have won major gains from new EU consumer laws. From buying cars and shopping by mail order or over the internet to combating timeshare touts, Labour MEPs have been at the forefront of new laws to protect and improve your rights.

Improving consumer rights

An end to rogue traders and bully-boy salesmen:

The Unfair Commercial Practices Directive introduces new protections against aggressive selling methods and misleading by omission. It also outlaws practices such as fake prize draws or bogus closing down sales and it includes a general duty to trade fairly, which will pick up any unlawful practices that these protections miss. Rogue traders using bully-boy tactics, scam lottery merchants, and especially those who prey on elderly or vulnerable consumers will at last have no way out from the force of the law.

Crackdown on timeshare touts:

European laws to crackdown on unscrupulous timeshare sharks mean that you now have the right to receive a full description of the property you are buying, a full list of your rights, and a minimum 'cooling off' period of 10 days after signing a contract offering you the opportunity to change your mind and pull out of the deal. Labour MEPs have succeeded in winning a review of this law and our now campaigning for protection to be extended even further.

Better rights for air passengers: Ever turned up for a plane to find that you've been "bumped off"? Now tough new EU laws guarantee your right to proper compensation – however much you paid for the ticket. And if you're heavily delayed, you will be entitled to meals, refreshments and hotel accommodation. Unlike the old rules, the new rules will apply to charter flights and scheduled flights.

No more dud gadgets: In March 2003, laws voted in by Labour Euro-MPs came into effect which gave shoppers two years to complain to retailers about new goods they purchase that turn out to be faulty and at least one year for second-hand goods. If certain products now become faulty within six months of being purchased, it is up to the retailer to prove that it was in good condition when it was first sold. If a product does go wrong, consumers can expect it to be repaired or replaced, or they get their money back. The good news is this law applies right across the EU, from a video bought in Manchester to one bought in Madrid.



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Rights on distance selling: Purchases made by mail order or on the phone are on the increase. European laws will protect you from being ripped off by allowing a 7 working days "cooling off" period to change your mind and pull out of any deal, and forcing suppliers to give you a full refund if they do not honour the contract. Labour MEPs are currently pushing for this law to be extended, and for it to cover more services, including mortgages, thus protecting consumers when they are making one of the biggest financial decisions of their lives.

Rights on-line: With the advent of e-commerce, consumers are now able to buy goods and services not only from the UK, but from all over Europe at the click of a button. To encourage consumers to reap the benefits of this new technology, Labour MEPs are campaigning for stronger rights for on-line consumers. European legislation has provided a step forward, with on-line traders having to provide accurate and detailed information

to the consumer on prices, terms and conditions. Consumers also have the choice of opting out of receiving junk e-mails from these companies. The next step is to protect consumers when things go wrong and to ensure that their credit card details and personal information are protected from on-line fraud.

An end to "rip-off" car prices: Evidence shows that British consumers have been over-charged by motor manufacturers compared to other European consumers. By keeping a monopoly control of dealerships, manufacturers blocked dealers who wanted to sell a wider range of cars from more than one manufacturer. The EU has now adopted a new regime which will open up the after-sales and spare parts market and give more flexibility for dealers to sell more than one make of car at the same site. This new approach, which has been phased in since October 2003, is welcomed by Labour MEPs as bringing real competition into the car market and lower prices for all our benefit.

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