

# The roots of solidarity



**Welcome to my first ever blog! As the newly elected GMB National President, I can't tell you how proud I am to have the opportunity to serve our great union and be part of its history. I hope that through a regular President's blog, you will get to know me better.**

My first few months as President have been busy ones. Since being elected at Congress in June, I've attended the Durham Miners Gala, the Tolpuddle festival in Dorset, London Pride, the NHS 70th birthday celebration/demo, the Birmingham and West Midlands women's conference, the young members' political school, the first ever Mary Turner award ceremony for an inspirational young woman in Barking and Dagenham and stood alongside GMB members on the John Roan School picket line, against forced academisation. Wherever GMB members are taking strike action, you have my support and if I cannot be there with you in person, then I will always be with you in spirit.



“Solidarity really is my favourite word and all the above events encapsulate the essence of that word completely.”

For me, solidarity sums up everything that I believe about the best of human nature and what a society should be based on. People creating positive relationships with each other, based on co-operation, not coercion.

It was a real honour for me to be able to lay a wreath on behalf of GMB members at the grave of the Tolpuddle martyr James Hammett. He was born in 1811 and one of the 6 Tolpuddle Martyrs put on trial and then transported to Australia for swearing a secret oath as members of the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers. These men, as it says on James's head stone, were the pioneers of Trades Unionism and the Champions of Freedom. The freedom that allows people to self-organise; to come together to fight for better working conditions. Even after the Tolpuddle Martyrs were deported, thousands of others showed their support by protesting and petitioning on the men's behalf to demand their pardon.

We can never take that freedom for granted. The current Conservative government has attempted to make it harder for us to withdraw our labour and there are some Tories, I'm sure, who would like to see an end to trade unions altogether. There are many regions of the world where people are denied access to freedom of association and assembly.

“Joining a trade union is an act of solidarity in itself. To become a GMB member is to join 618,000 other like-minded people, who want to see a more just and equal society.”

The huge procession of brass bands and trade union banners at the Durham Miners Gala stirred up wonderful emotions of solidarity past and present, linking workers across the ages in their struggles. The sense of pride in those representing former mining villages is so obvious and so uplifting for others to see, especially the young. It's an unforgettable joyous day of trade union and community spirit. If you have never attended, then you really should!

The Women Chainmakers' Festival of Cradley Heath and the Burston School Strike Rally are two events that I didn't get to attend this year, but they are definitely on my list for 2019.





It is important to remember our roots, celebrate our past, at the same time as organising for a better future.

I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible in the coming months, whenever I am invited to regional events and campaigns. A huge thank you to those I have already met. You have given me such a warm reception.

In Solidarity,

Barbara Plant  
GMB National President

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