

**GMB**

**CONGRESS 2024**

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**BARBARA PLANT  
(National President)  
(In the Chair)**

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**Held in:**

**The Bournemouth International Conference Centre,  
Bournemouth**

**on:**

**Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

**Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

**Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

**Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

**-and-**

**Thursday, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

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**PROCEEDINGS:**

**DAY FIVE**

**(Thursday, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2024)**

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## **FIFTH DAY'S PROCEEDINGS**

**THURSDAY, 13<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2024**

*(Conference assembled at 9.00 a.m.)*

Call to Order

THE PRESIDENT: For the very last time this week, could I call Congress to Order.

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

THE PRESIDENT: I have a couple of announcements. Firstly, thank you everyone who took part in the leafletting, canvassing and in the march to Asda. What a fantastic message of solidarity with our workers we showed yesterday. Let's hope that Mr Dale got the same message as well. Thank you Southern Region for organising everything for yesterday afternoon. Thank you.

I want to say a congratulations to Stephen Reynolds of GMB Wales & South West Region. Stephen has won the Wales Union Learning Fund Inspired Learner of the Year Award. Our congratulations to Stephen. Well done.  
*(Applause)*

### **STANDING ORDERS REPORT NO. 7**

THE PRESIDENT: I call Karen Dudley to give SOC Report No. 7.

KAREN DUDLEY (Chair, Standing Orders Committee): President and Congress, Karen Dudley, Standing Orders Committee Chair, moving SOC Report No. 7.

Withdrawn motions. The SOC has been informed that the following motions have been withdrawn: Composite Motion 17 – Jewish/Muslim Relationships Between People and GMB Members – No to Anti-Semitism, from London Region and North East, Yorkshire & Humber Region; Motion 259 – Workers Must Fight for Palestine and a Lasting Peace, from London Region; and Motion 260 – Support and Defend the Calls for An Immediate Ceasefire in the Current Military Campaign in Gaza, from North East, Yorkshire & Humber Region.

Bucket collections. By way of update, the amount collected by North East, Yorkshire & Humber Region for the Rob Burrow MND was £583.22p.

*(Applause)* As stated before, that sum was made up to £1,000 by the region.

The amount collected by London Region for BLIS was £507.60 plus two euros, and online through a QR code that Ida set up was £94, making a total of £601.60p. *(Applause)*

Can I, personally, wish you all a safe onward journey home. President and Congress, I formally move adoption of SOC Report No. 7.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Karen. I can't think why anybody would want to be in opposition to anything that Karen said, so I am going to go straight to the vote. All those in favour of SOC Report No. 7, please show? Anyone against? That is carried. Karen and the rest of the SOC, thank you for all the work you did behind the scenes in keeping this Congress running smoothly. Thank you. *(Applause)* Just again about those charities, well done for raising that amount of money but that will go back to the regional committees to decide how much they want to add to those collections.

*SOC Report No. 7 was CARRIED.*

## **EMPLOYMENT POLICY: RIGHTS AT WORK**

THE PRESIDENT: We now move onto motions to be debated under Employment Policy: Rights at Work. Could I have the movers of Motions 87, 88 and 89 to the front, please. Could the mover of Motion 87 come to the rostrum.

### **ACAS**

#### **MOTION 87**

##### **87. ACAS**

This Congress calls on GMB to lobby the Labour party to bring what are currently ACAS guidelines into law, therefore making ACAS codes legally binding. Further to this we need to ensure that companies are potentially subject to sanctions in order to ensure they follow these laws.

With the current situation, even policies that are taken from ACAS guidelines can be safely ignored by companies as any financial sanction has only the same value, that they would have faced, should they had followed the policy in the first instance. The most obvious example of this was P&O sacking their workers a couple of years ago.

Within our branch, an incident at Cadent saw a dismissal for an alleged offence committed in December not be finally completed through disciplinary and appeal until September. Even at the

appeal stage, although an outcome was promised within five working days as per guidelines. It actually took 5 weeks (Appeal 30 August – outcome given 5 October). It is essential that sanctions are available to discourage and stop these transgressions against the ACAS codes.

It should also be the case that judges take such breaches into account whenever such incidents progress to a tribunal stage.

Employment rights have been consistently attacked by recent Conservative Governments and the next Labour Government needs to redress the balance in many areas. Enshrining ACAS codes into law would be a big step towards a fairer employment situation. This would also, give clarity to employees and employers and remove “grey” areas.

With the upcoming General Election there is a clear opportunity for GMB to put this to the Labour party and influence changes to employment law that the Labour Party are already developing.

Colleagues, it is the case that in employment tribunals ACAS codes are taken into consideration by judges so why not make it the law to start with?

### **L34 NORTH WST GAS BRANCH North West & Irish Region**

*(Referred)*

*The Motion was formally moved and formally seconded from the floor.*

### **LENGTH OF INVESTIGATION MOTION 88**

#### **88. LENGTH OF INVESTIGATION**

This Congress is aware of the ACAS Code of Conduct guidelines on disciplinary/grievance investigation. One point in those guidelines is stating that the length of investigation should be reasonable.

The word reasonable is not very specific. What is reasonable for one person might not be reasonable for someone else.

Two similar investigations, with similar accusation, same number of witnesses, similar factors. First is concluded in two weeks, second in three months. Both employers can argue that they been reasonable.

Congress recognises, that guidelines must be more clear on the length of the investigation. Word “reasonable” should be exchanged with time frame for investigation that is dictated by number of different factors – e.g. number of people that need to be interviewed and their shift pattern, documentation that needs to be taken into consideration, CCTV footage, extension of investigation to different departments etc.

Congress recognises that by placing strict rules on length of investigation will be beneficial for employees and will help to avoid unnecessary, prolonged stress.

**M27 LB MERTON BRANCH**  
**Southern Region**

*(Referred)*

KIM MARSHALL (Southern): Congress, I move Motion 88 – Length of Investigation. Congress is aware of the ACAS Code of Conduct guidance on conducting a workplace disciplinary workplace grievance investigation. The guidance states that an employer must carry out the investigation promptly and within a reasonable time. An employer should provide a provisional timescale within which the investigation should be completed. Let's be clear. How often does this actually happen?

We do realise, however, that a complicated matter may take several weeks to conduct properly, whereas a relatively simple matter may only require a small amount of time. If, for any reason, as stated in the ACAS Guidance, there is any delay in the investigation's conclusion, then this should be discussed and explained to those involved and should also be noted in the investigation report. Again, how often does this happen?

Let's look at the word "reasonable". It is not very specific. What is reasonable for one person may not be reasonable for someone else. Prolonged investigations not only create an atmosphere of uncertainty and stress for our members who are under scrutiny, but it can also affect their mental health and wellbeing. Prolonged investigations also have an effect on our member's family. The strain of the investigation can put pressure on relationships, causing stress, anxiety and uncertainty within the family unit.

Let's take two similar investigations, both with comparable accusations, such as the number of witnesses and similar factors, yet the first investigation is concluded in two weeks, but the second take three months. In reality both employers can argue that they have been reasonable.

Congress recognises that guidelines must be clear on the length of the investigation and proposes that the word "reasonable" should be replaced with the word "timeframe". A clear timeframe for the investigation must be established between the employer and the member, taking into account various factors – e.g. the number of people to be interviewed and their shift patterns, documentation that needs to be taken into consideration, CCTV footage, if any, and extension of investigation to different departments if required.

In conclusion, Congress recognises that by ensuring disciplinary grievance investigations are conducted within a clear timeframe, this will benefit our members' mental health and avoid unnecessary prolonged stress. Congress also recognises that restricting the timeframe may have unintended consequences on our members so we must ensure that the timeframe reflects any exceptional circumstances and is not to the detriment of our members. Therefore, this motion has been agreed to be referred for further consideration. Thank you. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Well done, Kim. Thank you. Secunder?

RACHEL WEBBER (Southern): Congress, I second Motion 88. "Reasonable". Yes. It's an interesting word. Is it reasonable to intentionally drag out a grievance in the hope that the members will give up the fight? Is it reasonable to make members wait for days or weeks just for a response? Is it reasonable for a grievance still to be going on months after it started? As my colleague has just said, every investigation is different, but having a clear timeline to support our members would be more reasonable. We all know the delay tactics that are used and we do our best to challenge them, but when we do that word "reasonable" pops up again. Congress, please help our members by supporting this motion. Thank you. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Rachel. I call the mover of Motion 89.

## **ACAS GUIDANCE MOTION 89**

### **89. ACAS GUIDANCE**

This branch calls upon Congress to lobby ACAS and change their guidelines which do not benefit working people and are balanced in favour of employers and against employees. We have seen employers use ACAS guidance to take advantage of their power over the worker and we feel that this should be addressed by changes to the ACAS guidance.

These changes are:

- **Telling employees to attend disciplinary meetings within 48 hours:** Notice should be reasonable depending upon, the severity of the potential sanction, the documentation involved, and any adverse characteristics of the employee receiving the invite. Requesting a postponement of the meeting because a union representative is not available should not be abused to gain more time for a worker to prepare.
- **The statutory right to be accompanied to disciplinary investigations:** we say that the initial stages are crucial to the employees' case and that disciplinary investigations are not separated from disciplinary procedures. ACAS guidance allows an employer to hold an investigation with no representation or witness on behalf of the employee who is compelled to co-operate.

- **The right to face your accuser:** to face your accuser is Natural Law which under ACAS guidelines does not extend to the workplace. We say that unless there are compelling reasons, an employee accused of misconduct should have a right to examine, face to face, their accuser.

Trade unions form a third of the ACAS Council and have an input. We call upon Congress to support the changes in the motion and to instruct our leadership to gain the support of trade union ACAS delegates to make changes in the ACAS guidance to ensure fairness at work prevails.

## **P05 HOTELS AND CATERING BRANCH London Region**

*(Carried)*

BRENDAN DUFFIELD (London): Congress, I move Motion 89 – ACAS Guidance. Many of you are familiar with ACAS, the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service. They have been around since 1972 helping to resolve disputes between workers and employees. Today they issue guidance that employers often follow, and the guidance can be used as evidence in an employment tribunal. The ACAS guidance is agreed upon by their governing bodies, which include trade union delegates.

This motion calls upon our union to raise matters with those trade union ACAS delegates. We want to oppose amendments to this guidance in the following way. Firstly, when an employee is accused of misconduct, they could lead to a dismissal. They or their representatives should be able to talk to witnesses in the disciplinary hearing. How often have you seen in an investigation bundle evidence that clearly doesn't make sense? It could be cleared up by talking to witnesses, which is us. Our members must not be dismissed on false facts, incorrect or just barely recorded witness statements. If witnesses are valuable, then we should be able to cross-check the main facts of the case with them. We believe that this is right and fair.

Secondly, ACAS says that employers should allow employees to be accompanied at formal disciplinaries or grievance hearings. There is no accompanying right to any investigation meeting. We ask that this be amended as these investigations are just fact finding, or so they tell us. But they are intimidating and just having your rep in the room can help some people. Having a rep present will also make the investigation play fair. We believe that ACAS guidance should state that any meeting or contribution to the disciplinary out should be fair and it should allow representation.

Finally, meetings should not be called at short notice. We do have a right to move a meeting if it is inconvenient for the member or the rep. We don't want to abuse this. We need enough time to prepare. These proposed amendments may or may not reflect your experience, but unscrupulous employers take advantage of the guidance to dismiss employees unfairly. ACAS guidance should be balanced, reflecting the values of our society. Please support this motion. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Brendan. Secunder?

MIZAN CHAUDHURY (London): Congress, I am a first-time delegate and a first-time speaker. (*Applause*) I am seconding Motion 89. We are lobby ACAS to update the disciplinary guidance. AGAS produces guidance for use nationwide in dealing with employer/employee relationships. The guidance is not law, but for most companies and organisations it is the primary legal resource that they navigate on heavily to navigate industrial relations. Some of the guidance lacks sufficient robustness. As my colleague, Brendan, has stated, we want three things: first, advice that allows us to question witnesses and challenge statements for accuracy; secondly, advice that permits having a companion or a representative present during investigating meetings and, thirdly, advice which says that meetings should be set at appropriate times, not called at short notice. These are only small changes and only changes in guidance, but we feel that they would have a profound effect on our members when they fall on difficult times. Please support this motion. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Well done, Mizan. It is really hard having to wait all week to make your first speech, but well done. Does anyone wish to speak in opposition? (*No response*) In that case, I ask Carol Robertson from the CEC to give the response.

CAROL ROBERTSON (CEC): Congress, I am responding on behalf of the CEC to Motions 87, 88 and 89. The CEC is asking for both Motions 87 and 88 to be referred. The CEC shares the concerns raised in Motion 87 but the call to make the ACAS Guiding Codes legally binding may have unintended consequences.

Currently, if a tribunal finds that there has been an unjustifiable breach of the ACAS Code of Practice it can increase or decrease compensation by up to 25%, but making these guides and codes legally binding risks going back to a period of satellite litigation in 2004 to 2009, with cases being debarred



and delayed by employers taking points like compliance with statutory disciplinary procedures. Making the minimum standards in the codes the norm may also make the process too restrictive and lead to employers seeking to undermine agreements which the GMB has reached with them to new statutory minimums.

Likewise, on Motion 88, placing strict rules on the length of time that an investigation can take may have unintended consequences, similar to those we have set out. The CEC understands that this is not the intention of the branches submitting these motions, and the recommendation is to refer Motion 87 and Motion 88 for further consideration.

The CEC is supporting Motion 89 with two qualifications. The first is to reflect further explanation from the branch, though it is not suggesting that workers abuse the postponement ability for disciplinary meetings. Rather, ACAS Guidance should be made clear and transparent so that an employee facing disciplinary action should be given as much time as is reasonable.

Secondly, it is to note current ACAS Guidance on when disciplinary hearings should be held, that an employee has time leading up to and during an investigation process to view any evidence against them and prepare for any ongoing process. Reasonable adjustments in any process to allow for any disability are also recommended by ACAS. Finally, we do not believe that approaches in criminal law should automatically be applied to employment law in practice with regard to having the right to face an accuser. We must be mindful of legislation concerning harassment, particularly sexual harassment which requires a reporter to be protected against further abuse or victimisation. As such it is not appropriate to request a reporter to face their abuser, and such a requirement will likely lead to fewer complaints being made.

The CEC is, therefore, asking for Motions 87 and 88 to be referred, and for Congress to support Motion 89 with the qualifications set out. Thank you.  
*(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Carol. Does North West & Irish Region accept the reference back? *(Agreed)* Does Southern Region accept the reference back on Motion 88? *(Agreed)* Does London Region accept the qualification on Motion 89? *(Agreed)* Thank you. I don't need to take the reference back items. So I will go straight to Motion 89. All those in favour, please show? Anyone against? That is carried.

*Motion 87 was REFERRED.*

*Motion 88 was REFERRED.*

*Motion 89 was CARRIED.*

## **INDUSTRIAL AND ECONOMICAL: GENERAL**

THE PRESIDENT: We now move onto motions to debate under Industrial and Economic: General. Could the mover of Composite 5 come to the rostrum.

### **IMPROVE CONSULTATION AND INFORMATION RIGHTS IN A POTENTIAL REDUNDANCY SITUATION AND ENSURE ADMINISTRATORS COMPLY WITH EMPLOYMENT LAW DURING INSOLVENCY**

#### **COMPOSITE 5**

*(Covering Motions:*

*83. Improve Consultation and Information Rights in a Potential Redundancy Situation – Southern Region.*

*110. Ensure Administrators Comply with Employment Law During Insolvency – Midlands Region).*

### **IMPROVE CONSULTATION AND INFORMATION RIGHTS IN A POTENTIAL REDUNDANCY SITUATION AND ENSURE ADMINISTRATORS COMPLY WITH EMPLOYMENT LAW DURING INSOLVENCY**

This Congress notes that the current collective redundancy consultation requirements as defined in Section 188 of the Trade Unions and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 excludes the statutory obligation on employers to consult at establishments with fewer than 20 employees, narrowly defines establishment circumnavigating the requirement to consult in the event of large scale redundancies within a single entity spread across multiple sites and includes no statutory right to individual information, notification or trade union representation.

This Congress believes that this causes a significant detriment and added stress to members located within smaller workplaces and remote workers, particularly in the event of organisation wide or multisite proposals. We believe that every employee should have the right to be consulted on their redundancy, yet administrators do not follow this process.

This Congress calls on GMB to use their political influence to call on the government to ensure that when a company becomes insolvent, that the administrators ensure they comply with employment law. Administrators use their legal protection and liability protection to ignore parts of employment legislation during the first 14 days of taking charge of failing companies.

We ask GMB to request their political allies to ensure that for an administration of an insolvent company to be only indemnified if they follow the relevant employment legislation when conducting their business. We believe this is fair and would have positively impacted on many of our members, such as those at Wilkinsons, if this had been in place.

This Congress resolves that the GMB should alongside TUC and Labour Party colleagues where appropriate, develop and implement a strategy to bring about changes to the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act so that all establishments have a right to collective consultation. That all establishments within an organisation are covered by the same obligations as the largest establishment if redundancies are proposed to take place within multiple establishments during the protected period, and to see the introduction of a statutory right to individual notification, information and trade union representation in all proposed redundancy situations.

Moving region: Southern  
Seconding region: Midlands

*(Carried)*

MARK WHITFIELD (Southern): Congress, I move Composite 5. I'm a first-time delegate and a first-time speaker. *(Applause)*

President and Congress, the law on redundancy consultation within the Trade Unions and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, as with much of UK law, is significantly flawed. There's a loophole big enough to steer a ship through. This loophole says that establishments with less than 20 employees do not have to comply with statutory rights to consultation as shown in cases where an entire ship going through redundancy has less than 20 employees and so did not meet the redundancy consultation minimum levels.

The 20-employee establishment threshold has been used time and time again by unscrupulous employers, particularly when going through administration, such as in the case of Woolworth, our Wilki Store colleagues and it is now happening again in the cycle retailer Wiggle. This huge gap in the law must be something we campaign to change as a trade union.

As GMB members we know only too well that many employers have workplaces with less than 20 employees and this allows them to refuse the basic rights of our members, even in the large employers, such as Wilko, when the whole company employs far more than the minimum requirement. This complete disregard for the need for redundancy rights in small stores is exacerbated in significant cases where the employer enters insolvency and administrators are called in. These ruthless administrators use their legal liability protection to ignore sections of the employment legislation during their first 14 days of taking charge of the company.

We, as a trade union, owe it to our members, both those who have been through such appalling situations and future members who need our

protection to ensure that we never allow members to be treated in this way again during what is the most devastating and difficult time for any person in their working life facing the prospects of losing your job and your income without the basic rights for consultation and support.

This composite calls for the GMB to campaign alongside the TUC and Labour Party to bring about changes to the law to ensure that the workers are given the protection and rights that they deserve in a redundancy situation and to close these loopholes once and for all. We call for the GMB to campaign to ensure that insolvency companies can only use their indemnity if they fully comply with the legal employment rights of our members, including for establishments of under 20 members.

The law on establishments for companies must be changed and we must campaign to ensure that every single member in these employers have the right to individual notification and collective consultation within trade union representation, and that no administrator can disregard any employment rights at a whim. I urge you to support this composite and our colleagues going through this trauma at this time. Thank you. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Well done, Mark. You can relax now. I call a seconder for Composite 5, please.

JOHN-PAUL WESTWOOD (Midlands): Good morning, Congress. I am seconding Composite 5. No person or organisation should be above the law. Our role is to organise so that members can stand up for their rights, and when their rights are ignored we have to stand with them. Administrators have continually ignored employment rights under the banner of trying to save businesses. Let's be clear. No worker at Wilko felt saved. No worker at my previous employer, Wiggle, felt saved and no worker at the body shop will feel saved if that business goes under too. These workers have been denied their consultation rights and have their abilities to argue for their own jobs curtailed. Administrators get paid regardless of the fate of companies. Our members don't! Administrators must abide by the law just like the rest of us or they should face the consequences. I second. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Well done, John-Paul. I call the mover of Composite 6.

**MAKE SUMS TO BE POTENTIALLY PAID BY THE INSOLVENCY SERVICE FROM THE NATIONAL INSURANCE FUND EQUIVALENT TO A PRIORITY DEBT UNDER**

## **THE INSOLVENCY ACT 1986 AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST IN INSOLVENCY SITUATIONS**

### **COMPOSITE 6**

*(Covering Motions:*

*111. Make Sums to be potentially paid by the Insolvency Service from the National Insurance Fund equivalent to a priority debt under the Insolvency Act 1986 – Southern Region*

*112. Conflict of Interest in Insolvency Situations – Southern Region)*

### **MAKE SUMS TO BE POTENTIALLY PAID BY THE INSOLVENCY SERVICE FROM THE NATIONAL INSURANCE FUND EQUIVALENT TO A PRIORITY DEBT UNDER THE INSOLVENCY ACT 1986 AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST IN INSOLVENCY SITUATIONS**

This Congress notes that the taxpayer is far too often left covering most of the cost of Statutory Redundancy Payments and Statutory Notice Pay Compensation in the event of administration and liquidation events as it is currently not given preferential creditor status.

This Congress notes that there is currently no provision in place for a major secured creditor in an insolvent organisation being appointed as an agent for the Insolvency Practitioner.

This Congress believes that this creates the opportunity for a creditor to call for an entity to be placed into an insolvency process in anticipation of potential fees to be received for services rendered in the insolvency process, at minimal risk to themselves due to holding security over assets. Creating a very real perception of a potential conflict of interest, alongside a lack of faith from other creditors and stakeholders in the administration of the insolvency due to this.

This Congress believes that this should be changed so that the preservation of employment and associated reduction of the cost on the state are reduced as far as practically possible.

This Congress resolves that the GMB should alongside TUC and Labour Party colleagues where appropriate, develop and implement a strategy to promote the obligation on Insolvency Practitioners to preserve employment and reduce the potential cost to taxpayers as far as practically possible by making costs incurred by the National Insurance Fund equivalent to preferential creditor status in voting and consideration terms under the Insolvency Act.

Moving region: Southern

Seconding region: Southern

*(Carried)*

TIM LANGLOIS (Jersey, Southern): Congress, I move Composite 6. This is a complex issue so I am going to try and keep this simple. Congress notes that in the event of a company going into administration and liquidation, the taxpayer is too often left to pick up the costs of redundancy payments and statutory notice pay compensation. At this time items are given preferential creditor status. Congress believes that this situation needs to be changed. Preferential creditor status is where an individual or an

organisation has a priority to be paid the money it is owed should the debtor declare bankruptcy.

This Congress wants the GMB in conjunction with the TUC and the Labour Party associates where appropriate to implement and develop a way forward. Congress wants to propose an obligation on insolvency practitioners to keep people employed. This will help reduce the potential cost to taxpayers as far as practically possible by making costs incurred by the National Insurance Fund equivalent to preferential creditor status in voting and consideration terms under the Insolvency Act.

This issue came to light recently with the collapse of Wilco. At various points during the process of Wilco there were a number of bids on the table which could have maintained employment for around 80% of the staff. Unfortunately, this did not quite reach the return threshold needed to succeed and, sadly, the company went into liquidation. The preferential element of employment debt is limited to unpaid wages in the four months preceding insolvency, and this is further reduced to a period of eight weeks, with holiday pay restricted to a maximum of 30 days and subject to the statutory cap.

Because of the minimum contractual notice period of six weeks in the event of redundancy, there is a significant number of former Wilco employees who are unsecured creditors in the Wilco estate. Together with those whose salaries exceed the redundancy cap, this is estimated to be half of the workforce. Six thousand former employees are still contractually owed money by Wilco. If the debt is given preferential creditor status then the debt to the employer is more likely to be paid at least in part through the share of any remaining assets to the company and before less important debts are paid. The costs of staff redundancy should no longer be the responsibility of the taxpayer. The primary focus of this motion is the fact that the taxpayer picks up the costs of redundancy and this is not right. Thank you. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Tim. Secunder?

MEMTAX KHAN (Southern): President, I am seconding Composite 6. As outlined in the composite motion, there is a clear conflict of interest and insider advantage that a major secured creditor may gain through the provision of credits of businesses on the verge of administration. GMB must do all it can to make sure that the interests of the people on the sharp end of administration – our members – are not disadvantaged from

companies which you could almost say are circling in anticipation like vultures.

We are, therefore, calling for robust restrictions on the ability to become a paid agent or to consult during the time of an insolvency. Nobody should be profiting from a time when our members are losing their livelihoods. Please support. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Well done. I call the mover for Motion 113.

## **BETTER BUSINESS ACT MOTION 113**

### **113. BETTER BUSINESS ACT**

This Congress requests the GMB to align itself and work with our political allies to support and meet the aims of the Better Business Act campaign.

Work must be done towards updating the 2006 UK Companies Act so it is no longer an option to pursue profit at the expense of workers, communities and the environment.

The Better Business Act will aim to transform the way we do business so that every company takes ownership of its social and environmental impact,

The campaign will call on Government to amend the Companies Act to ensure businesses are legally responsible for benefiting workers, customers, communities and the environment while delivering profit. The interests of shareholders will not be paramount in the wider interests of other stakeholders. Directors will be required to report on the balance between people and society, the planet and profit in a strategic report.

This Congress believes this policy will appeal to many of our members nationwide and in particular will resonate with our younger membership and young workers in general.

## **S13 SOUTH EAST TRANSPORT BRANCH Southern Region**

*(Carried)*

DAVE CLEMENTS (Southern): I move Motion 113: Better Business Act. You can read from the text of the motion the outline of the aims. We all know from the situation from which we work, fighting against companies and directors whose sole pursuit is to maximise profit and enhance the interests of shareholders. There is no real requirement other than to work within the law, and we know even that can be dubious.

I am from Dover and worked for 30 years within the P&O Group. Big shipping companies are some of the toughest in the world, with the maximisation of profit always the number one priority. P&O is no exception. The directors will remind you that they were only carrying out their legal duties in that regard.

We saw last year with the sacking of 700 workers that social and community responsibility did not exist. This issue clearly has wider implications and the need for wider reform but the damage to the local community in east Kent as a result of the sackings cannot be measured.

What would a Better Business Act do? The ambition is to amend section 172 of the Companies Act so requiring companies to be legally empowered to operate in a manner that benefits stakeholders, including workers, customer, communities and the environment whilst still delivering profit. Changing section 172 of the Companies Act would move businesses away from the shareholder primacy profit-seeking model. We have to wake up to a world where profit does not come at a cost to the planet. There needs to be an end to the profit-at-all-costs mentality. The wording of section 172 has become an anachronism not reflecting reality.

The global financial crisis, Covid-19, climate change and other social challenges are forcing people to re-think and focus on the triple bottom line: the planet, people and profit. The default position would be not prioritising shareholders but requiring consideration of social and environmental impacts. The change to section 172 would bring into alignment imperatives for businesses to work towards UN sustainable development goals to 2030 for economic decarbonising to meet the Paris Climate Agreements. The Better Business Act works against the backdrop of the Freeman Doctrine which prevailed for so many years up to global events in the new millennium. The prevailing view at that time was that the responsibility of business is to increase its profits and there was no social responsibility to the public or society other than as mentioned in the law. Value for shareholders was paramount.

The 2007/2008 financial crisis saw a change in the development of views that most successfully run businesses are those promoting the best interests of all. The Better Business Act would not be some silver bullet bringing about massive change. There is still a requirement to make profit and that will never change. I spent my working life with foreign unions from France, Belgium, The Netherlands and Germany, and those countries have strong employment legislation. We all know about our comrades in France



where union density is low because fundable rights are so powerful. To believe that the Better Business Act would bring about a massive change and impact on the roles we currently have in the trade union Movement is, quite frankly, for the birds. The struggles would go on so our roles would not be diluted. However, the view that the Act is more symbolic may be a bit harsh in a tough world where the change may slightly tilt the unlevel playing field. It is difficult to argue against a change that requires business to share society, community and environmental factors in pursuit of their profits. Thank you. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Well done, Dave. Secunder?

JACK BEDDOE (Southern): Congress and President, I am seconding Motion 113, the Better Business Act. I'm a first-time delegate and a first-time speaker. *(Applause)* Work must be done in updating the 2006 UK Companies Act, so there is no longer an option for business to pursue profit at the expense of workers, communities and the environment. The Better Business Act aims to transform the way business is done so that every company takes ownership of its social and environmental impact.

For the next Labour Government to deliver economic stability and to complete its mission to achieve the highest sustainable growth in the G7 we have to legislate to ensure that we have economic health as well as growth. By amending section 172 of the Companies Act we can strengthen the obligations placed upon company directors ensuring that they must have regard for the interests of their workers, communities and the environment. I accept the qualification set up by the CEC that this would be just one part of a wider set of actions being campaigned for by the GMB and our political allies, to hold business to account and ensure that businesses are forced to report holistically and improve their practices overall. Please support this motion. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Jack. I call the mover of Composite 7.

## **REGULATING THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TECHNOLOGY ON THE WORKFORCE TO SAFEGUARD JOBS**

### **COMPOSITE 7**

*Covering Motions:*

*115. The Impact of AI on the Workforce – GMB Scotland*

*116. Regulating AI Technology to Safeguard Jobs – London Region*

*118. Controlling Artificial Intelligence)*

## **REGULATING THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TECHNOLOGY ON THE WORKFORCE TO SAFEGUARD JOBS**

GMB needs to ensure that workers have a real say in how AI is used and introduced at work in order to protect workers' rights, privacy and ensure job security and dignity at work.

This Congress notes latest news releases where we see how AI technology can and probably will take over our jobs and society as we know it.

People like Elon Musk are advocating to make this happen making everyone retire from their skills relying on a machine to replace our everyday job. Across the country many corporations are introducing modern and advanced AI, they are telling shareholders and employees that this new technology will advance efficiency, increase profitability, and make employees' workday easier. What could possibly go wrong? Quite a few things.

We must earn to live- the only people who will benefit are the rich and the middle classes as the working class become poorer and, in a society, where they no longer fit in.

This Congress notes many examples of artificial intelligence (AI) which have created unfair bias against women, people with disabilities and racial or ethnic minorities. No worker should face discrimination or unfairness resulting from the use of AI.

Furthermore, GMB is concerned at the absence of community and worker voices at the Global Summit on AI Safety held on 31 October 2023.

Union and worker involvement is key to harnessing this new revolution.

As a forward-thinking union, we need to develop a plan to tackle the elements of AI to ensure it is done fairly for our members and they do not suffer detriment.

We need to have training in place and handy guides for our workplace reps to help them ensure the protections required for members are put in place by businesses. We need to ensure that any AI system must never be allowed to replace jobs unless in the most dangerous of circumstances, allowing us to continue to work and earn an honest living.

Technology is moving at speed and growing beyond our imagination. this will become out of control before we know it so regulations must be in place and a promise, they cannot replace us or our jobs.

This Congress calls on the development of a robust and in-depth analysis on the danger, threat and impact of AI to our union members.

AI systems must be regulated to need human control over them to avoid us to become a race that no longer exists. Therefore, we ask Congress to call for a change in the law to ensure that AI systems do not replace our workers jobs.

We call on:

- All GMB sectors to look at the impact of AI across their industries and ensure we are part of discussions on new collective agreements.
- GMB to work with government departments, TUC and other Unions to ensure that there is genuine and early active consultation in all discussions around AI in respect of the allocation of work, algorithm setting, monitoring and surveillance, monitoring performance and productivity.

Moving region: London  
Seconding region: GMB Scotland

*(Carried)*

ADRIAN STOHR (London): Congress, I move Composite 7 on regulating the impact of AI. It is becoming more and more clear that AI technology is becoming more and more of a reality. The king of technology, Elon Musk, is creating robots to look and sound like humans, holding conversations and carrying out tasks as we do in our everyday lives. If one man is allowed to explore beyond the boundaries, where will it leave us?

Technology is moving at a speed and growing beyond our imagination. Advanced technology is being used to control our banking systems and we must ask who is in control of your money. How many businesses conduct themselves in this way these days? Congress, imagine a factory employing workers as they invest in AI technology to fulfil those jobs. What happens when there is no longer a need for us? People are losing their jobs more and more these days with nowhere else to go because of the greedy corporates who are replacing us with technology, driving the wages down until they can no longer afford to utilise our public services, enjoying the finer things in life or simply just trying to get by in life.

This Government is allowing it to happen. I think we can agree that that does not come as any surprise really. They have all been robbing us for the last 14 years, let's face it.

In March 2023 BBC reporter Chris Valence said that AI's impact will vary across different sectors with up to 300 million workers across all industries will see their jobs being replaced with 46% in administration, 44% of professionals, 6% in construction and 4% in maintenance being automated. Congress, AI is a scary world when we hear that 300 million of us around the world could be phased out within a couple of years.

Unions and workers need to be involved in discussions over this technology. We need to put in place regulated standards so that workers will not be put on the scrapheap. We must make a stand or this will become out of our control as we know it. We were concerned at the lack of workers' voices at the first summit and again at the recent second world AI summit in Seoul in May. Many of the world leaders pledged to govern this responsibility but who is pulling their purse strings? GMB has been involved in the TUC working group, which has published a draft Bill on regulating AI in the

workplace and ensure transparency and fairness for workers. Also to introduce rights to regulate the algorithms set by management decisions, which so often they are hidden. We must monitor by surveillance. We ask the next Government to take this on board.

Any AI system must never be allowed to replace jobs unless in the most dangerous of circumstances. We must be allowed to work and earn an honest living and not become replaced. We must insist on regulating AI technology to safeguard jobs. Please support this composite before it is too late. Thank you. *(Applause)* Secunder, please?

STEPHEN MCGHEE (GMB Scotland): I'm a workplace rep for Scottish Gas. I'm a first-time delegate and a first-time speaker. *(Applause)* Congress, there needs to be a development of a robust and in-depth analysis on the danger, threat and impact of AI to our union members. We need a plan to tackle the elements of AI to ensure that there is consultation with reps, so when new technology is implemented it is done fairly and our members suffer no detriment.

With the introduction of AI in the workplace we have seen significant job losses, bias programming and unclear legal regulations.

At British Gas we have seen a new job-allocating system brought in that is supposed to make an engineer's day easier, more efficient and more productive. Sadly, this has not been the case, but by getting rid of our planners and despatchers we went from seeing seven customers a day to, on average, three customers a day now. The introduction of this new, simplified integrated planning and despatch system has caused a mass exodus of highly skilled and experienced engineers from a once-great company. A considerable amount of our members who have suffered undue stress and mental health problems resulting in sickness absences from work, leaving some of our most vulnerable customers without heating and hot water when they need it most. Also the fat cats sitting in their ivory towers can make a quick buck.

Congress, there must be the implementation of a plan for AI in how AI and software technology will be introduced into the workplace and a reps' guide within the reps' resources area within the GMB website. Thank you. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Well done, Stephen. Thank you. There is nobody in opposition, so I ask Kevan Hensby to give the reply on behalf of the CEC.

KEVAN HENSBY (CEC): President and Congress, I am responding, on behalf of the CEC, to Motion 113 and Composite 7.

On Motion 113 the CEC is supportive of the Better Business Act campaigns aimed to strengthen the obligations placed on company directors for having regard to the interests of employees and the environment in carrying out their duties. This can be achieved by amending section 172 of the Companies Act 2006.

Our first qualification is that employees, who wish to organise, negotiate and bargain collectively through their trade union, should be recognised as part of the employees' interest. Secondly, we would also not wish to align GMB and our work with political allies to meet the aims of this campaign. This would move our focus away from advocating other GMB policies that contain many calls which we believe would improve business practices for workers and the environment beyond what this campaign or Act calls for, which the Institute of Directors states would be largely symbolic.

On Composite 7, we support the aims of this composite. Our qualifications are, firstly, that the term 'artificial intelligence' can be applied to a huge variety of products and algorithms. Their complexity and variety prevent production of materials that cover all eventualities. In depth research has already been completed on this subject and presented to Congress 2022 through GMB's *Future of Work Report*. Alongside work within the union, our members need new rights, including consultation, so that appropriate AI can be challenged on a collective basis as set out in part of the report.

Lastly, Congress does not seek to bind the hands of our industrial negotiators. The call for the GMB to ensure that we are part of discussions on new collective agreements should not be interpreted as an instruction to our lay industrial structures, which we must have the freedom to respond to the circumstances and our members' priorities. Therefore, the CEC is asking Congress to support Motion 113 and Composite 7 with the qualifications set out. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Kevan. I think I heard it in the speech but just to confirm, does Southern accept the qualification on Motion 113? (*Agreed*) Thank you. Does London and Scotland accept the qualification on Composite 7? (*Agreed*) I will put all of those to the vote as there is no opposition. All those in favour of Composite 5, Composite 6, Motion 113 and Composite 7, please show? Anyone against? They are all carried.

*Composite 5 was CARRIED.*

*Composite 6 was CARRIED.*

*Motion 113 was CARRIED.*

*Composite 7 was CARRIED.*

## **CEC STATEMENT: ISRAEL AND PALESTINE**

THE PRESIDENT: Congress, we now move on to debate the CEC's Statement on Israel and Palestine. I do hope you have had a chance to read it. I will outline how we will take this debate. Once the Statement has been moved and seconded by the CEC, I will invite regions to speak on the statement as usual, with one speaker from each region. Then I will take the vote on the Statement. But before we start this debate, I want to say to you all that it is deeply felt and understood how important this matter is to many of us in this hall and in this union. The loss of life in this conflict and throughout the region's history is something which blights our understanding of humanity.

There is an unconscionable – ongoing – loss of life across Gaza, the West Bank and in Israel. We are people who believe in peace. We stand against violence and oppression wherever it occurs. I want to thank our activists who work to make this world a safer place. Inside this hall we can speak passionately about these issues but our Congress has to be a safe space to do this. Delegates, the nature of this topic means that there will be references made to acts of violence, sexual violence and other acts which may be difficult for delegates to hear.

Under Congress's Safeguard Policy each regional delegation should have their staff and lay member leads who can discuss any concerns with delegates. Central contacts are also available should delegates or staff need this as set out in the policy circulated. For clarity these central contacts, if you do have a safeguarding concern, are Wendy Bartland and Emma Johnson. I do urge you to be mindful of this space. If you are sharing trauma, remember, that we may be re-traumatising others in the room, so please, please, be mindful of language in your speeches if sharing your experience or that of others. Thank you.

Can I please ask Farzana Jumma to move the CEC Statement.

### **CEC Statement on Israel and Palestine**

The loss of life and destruction witnessed in Gaza and Israel has been horrific, and the past eight months have become one of the most shocking and gravest periods facing humanity and peace.

After over 75 years of suffering, Palestinians now face a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza as the Israeli military has made civilians pay the price of its response to the shocking Hamas attack of 7th October 2023, in which 1,200 people were killed, including children and over 250 Israelis taken as hostage. 36,000 Palestinians have been killed so far in 8 months of incessant bombardment and siege, with the majority of casualties identified being women and children according to United Nations (UN) reports. UN figures also show 500 Palestinians have been killed in the occupied West Bank since October 07th by Israeli forces, despite there being no armed hostilities.

Congress unequivocally condemns and rejects any attempts to legitimise any acts of terror, atrocity and killing of innocent civilians – be they Palestinian, Israeli or foreign nationals. We are also outraged that 3,500 Palestinians remain in prison without charge in Israel, while over 120 Israeli hostages are still being held by Hamas. All innocent civilians must be released unharmed immediately and unconditionally. They have the right to live in safety, security and dignity, and to never be subjected to collective punishment, regardless of the justification.

There is nowhere left to go in Gaza. Thousands remain under the rubble as over half of buildings lie damaged or destroyed, including schools and hospitals. Almost the entire population has been forcibly displaced, and into areas now in famine. Safe zones for refugees and even aid convoys are not spared from Israel's bombardment, with targeted strikes killing three UK nationals delivering aid.

This is a trade union issue. GMB abhors Israel's targeting of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions' offices in Gaza. All attacks on civilians are attacks on workers and must be condemned. We must also condemn the hate which inspire them from right-wing Israeli politicians, Hamas and those regional state actors who have sought to escalate this conflict into a wider regional war.

Conflict abroad must never be used to spread hate at home. Congress is deeply concerned by the dramatic increase of racist attacks, abuse, and rhetoric against Muslim and Jewish communities, and by intimidation over peaceful protest. We restate our zero-tolerance of anti-semitism, anti-Muslim hatred and any attempts to disguise such racism in support for the rights of Palestinians or Israelis.

Perpetuating a cycle of violence will not bring the security or dignity that Palestinians and Israelis deserve. This statement sets out GMB's support for a just and lasting peace. It does not propose new policy on events before October 07th which Congress policy extensively covers, but refers to this policy where relevant.

### **GMB's solidarity following October 07th**

In the early days of this conflict, our General Secretary and National President wrote to both the Israeli Histadrut and the Palestinian General Federation of Trade

Unions to extend our solidarity with their affiliates' members in their darkest hours.

GMB has many members who are connected to Israel and Palestine through family and work ties. As a health and emergency service workers union our members know the physical and mental scars that terrorism and conflict inflict. At least 300 health workers were killed in the first ten weeks of military action in Gaza.

GMB is proud to represent Muslim and Jewish workers here in the UK and our union will always provide a welcoming home to people of different backgrounds and faiths. We will continue to offer practical solidarity to members affected by the conflict and rising racism in the UK, and we can explore where the union can offer further support through training for GMB branches and representatives, including anti-Hate Crime training.

Congress recognises the contributions made by GMB branches and National Office totalling £11,450 for Medical Aid for Palestinians, one of the only international organisations able to provide humanitarian and medical services in Gaza. Congress sends its solidarity to civilians in Gaza and to the medical and emergency service personnel working under incredible risk to save lives.

### **Supporting human rights and humanitarian relief for Gaza**

Effective and prompt access to medicine, medical equipment, power, food, and water in Gaza must be enabled. The UK Government must immediately resume funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), as have Canada, France, Sweden and the European Union.

Congress reaffirms the CEC's 25th October 2023 Statement's call for international law to be upheld in this conflict. GMB has long deplored any action by a standing army or armed group which deliberately targets civilians, healthcare personnel and facilities, or takes insufficient care to ensure their safety (Motion 362: 2017).

Deliberate killing of civilians, hostage taking and collective punishment fall under categories of war crimes and crimes against humanity. We note that allegations of these acts and the responsibility of Hamas and Israeli government leaders for them are being considered by independent international institutions, namely the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

These allegations must be allowed to be investigated fully and freely, with warring parties taking action to ensure they are not complicit in such acts. Israel must comply fully with the binding provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 29th January and 24th May. The UK Government also has a legal responsibility to respect the decisions of the ICC and ICJ and to take action to ensure international law is upheld and applied consistently.

### **Supporting an immediate and permanent ceasefire**

The CEC has consistently echoed the United Nations' calls on Hamas and Israel to bring about a ceasefire. There must be an immediate and permanent ceasefire to prevent further loss of life and we note proposals to this effect made by the UN Security Council on 25th March 2024 and by US President Biden on 1st June.



While any influence GMB has to bring about a ceasefire will be limited, countries that do must take action. The UK does not permit supplying arms to Hamas, but does continue to permit arms sales to Israel through granting of export licences.

GMB opposes the UK Government's decision to continue exporting arms to Israel. We note UN warnings that any transfer of weapons used in Gaza is likely to violate international humanitarian law. Congress has opposed arms exports to Israel in response to previous conflict with Hamas (Motion 222: 2009, Emergency Motion 2: 2010) and the UK suspended exports from 2009 to 2015.

GMB is proudly a union for defence manufacturing workers. Our members predominantly work in shipbuilding and do not work on arms for export to Israel's military. We always work closely with our representatives when issues relating to exports arise and incorrect claims will be directly addressed. The union does not invest in, or hold contracts with, companies involved in Israel's actions in Gaza.

### **Supporting a just and lasting peace**

Securing a just and lasting peace in Israel and Palestine must be an immediate and a long-term priority of the international trade union movement. GMB continues to support peaceful solutions to crises in the Middle East based on socialist values, the unity of working people and rejection of terrorism, imperialism and fundamentalism (Motion 309: 2016).

Peace will not be just or enduring if decades of oppression, inequality and violence are left to another generation of Palestinians and Israelis to overcome. All efforts must be redoubled for a two-state solution that upholds the territorial integrity of both nations and peoples' inalienable rights to self-determination, safety and security. Israel must cease its expansion of illegal settlements across the West Bank and withdraw from occupying Palestinian territory which continues to be illegal under international law.

Congress restates its full support for an independent and viable Palestinian state, which must be recognised unconditionally by the international community including as a full member of the United Nations.

GMB continues to encourage disinvestment from, and boycott of goods of, companies who profit from Israel's illegal occupation, settlement-building and separation wall (Motion 276: 2011). GMB will carefully weigh the evidence against any UK employer accused of complicity and formulate a response in close consultation with our members in those employers.

Trade unions are an essential pillar of a permanent peace settlement. Congress reaffirms GMB's policy for direct engagement with unions in Palestine and Israel.

Against a backdrop of growing threats to democracy in Israel and systematic denial of equal rights for Palestinian citizens, building dialogue with civil society has never been more important. GMB is affiliated nationally to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (Motion 258: 2021) and we support our members' right to peacefully protest in solidarity with the Palestinian people, which is under attack. We also support efforts of progressive groups in Israel such as B'Tselem, Standing Together and Women Wage Peace to unite communities for peace, equality and

independence for all.

**For a just and lasting peace, GMB Congress calls for:**

- An immediate and permanent ceasefire to prevent further loss of life.
- The immediate and unconditional release of innocent civilians held unharmed, including all Palestinians imprisoned without charge in Israel and all remaining Israeli hostages held by Hamas.
- Warring parties to ensure they are not complicit in war crimes, including that Israel complies in full with the binding provisional measures issued by the ICJ.
- Israel and the international community to ensure humanitarian aid is delivered effectively and promptly into Gaza.
- The UK Government to ensure international law is upheld and applied consistently including respect for ICC and ICJ rulings, to also resume funding to UNRWA and immediately stop UK exports of arms to Israel in line with UN calls.
- Israel to cease its expansion of illegal settlements across the West Bank and withdraw from its illegal occupation of Palestinian territory.
- Redoubling of efforts for a two-state solution that upholds the territorial integrity of both nations and inalienable rights to self-determination, safety and security.
- Zero-tolerance of anti-semitism, anti-Muslim hate and any attempts to disguise such racism in support for the rights of Palestinians or Israelis.
- UK Government and the international community to recognise the State of Palestine unconditionally, including as a full member of the United Nations

FARZANA JUMMA (CEC): Congress, I am speaking on behalf of the CEC supporting the Statement on Palestine and Israel. This Statement has both been difficult and emotive for me, ensuring that we, as the GMB, are correctly measured in our words, check for any bias, which we all have, and most importantly be on the right side of history. We are unequivocally clear that advocating for the Palestinian people does not mean we deny the rights of the Jewish people. Let me be clear again. We do not bring the solution of peace by harming or hating the people in the State of Israel. We can all co-exist and there is no place for hate and racism in our society or in our movement. *(Applause)*

Race and faith should not be factors in these despicable acts against civilians, and anyone trying to draw us into that should know that we will not tolerate a hierarchy of racism and hate towards the Muslim and Jewish communities, neither in our workplaces.

What we are witnessing is savage and unconscionable. It is historic in the scale of carnage. Gaza is the most dangerous place in the world for children, mothers, journalists and health workers, and it is the most dangerous place for aid workers. We saw this when three of our own British aid workers, ex-military, were killed when the aid vehicle they were in was bombed.

The scale of savagery from the Israeli military is perhaps best told in numbers. Nearly 120,000 people have been killed or wounded, the majority women and children. Seventy per cent of Gaza's housing has been destroyed or damaged. Over 80% of schools have been damaged or destroyed. Every university has been destroyed. Every one of Gaza's 625,000 school children is going without an education now. Of Gaza's 36 hospitals, just four remain partially functioning.

Israel's unhinged violence has targeted every civilian sector in Gaza, not just health and education but destroying agricultural land, businesses, industry, road and everything you need to meet even the basic minimum standards to maintain life. Israel has intentionally cut off food, water, electricity and fuel supplies to Gaza. In Gaza two out of three people are suffering an imposed famine and catastrophic levels of hunger in this day and age, colleagues. This is collective punishment and is a war crime. Let's be clear on that again.

In the West Bank, including occupied East Jerusalem, Israel has slowly squeezed the living space for the Palestinian people with settlement expansions. This has happened whilst settlers have been allowed to force more than 1,000 people from their homes, de-populating tens of villages whilst terrorising the civilian population, all under the protection of the Israeli military. That military, in the meanwhile, is destroying homes, engaging in arbitrary arrest campaigns, detaining thousands without charge or trial and freely bombs and tears up any infrastructure. All of this is done openly, without shame and in front of the cameras. It was all done openly long before October 7<sup>th</sup>. Israel has breached every single human rights standard and every rule of law.

Sexual violence, sexualised torture and abuse, forced public stripping, sexual humiliation and rape are standard operating procedures in this oppression. Targeting all faiths in Palestine during religious observations is, again, a standard operating method and is covered in the media every year. Israel never allowed refugees to return home after the ethnic cleansing of 1948, and it never intended to end its occupation. Every single

settlement in the Occupied Territory amounts to a war crime under international law.

The question now is not how to talk around Israel's leaders because that time has gone. This Israeli Government will not be reasoned with. It will not be negotiated with and it will not take heed of international law or international institutions, and it will certainly not take any account of the humanity of the Palestinian people. We know that the UK is supplying Israel's military and making recognisance flights over Gaza. We also know that this means that the British politicians at the highest levels are absolutely aware what is happening on the ground in Gaza. The British Government will now allow us to see their own lawyers' legal advice on Israel's conduct and for this to be made public, but we don't really need to see this, do we, to know what that advice is? After all, it's all a matter of international law. Four months after the International Court of Justice ruled that Israel has a plausible case of genocide to answer for, two months after the UN Security Council ordered an immediate ceasefire and just one week after the International Court said it was applying for arrest warrants for senior Israeli leaders and five days after the ICJ ordered Israel to stop its aggression on Rafah, all of which Israel has ignored with the support of the US Government and ours. There is no doubt where international law is on this matter. The question now is where is the UK and the US on international law?

Despite an international outcry over the latest massacre in Rafah, Israeli forces are pressing ahead with the offensive. More people, including children, are being killed and more massacres are happening. There is only one way out. The trade union movement must speak as one and demand that Israel abides by international law and immediately ceases fire and withdraws to outside the boundaries of Gaza and ending its violent operations in the occupied West Bank. In this way, we can secure the unfettered access of the massive amounts of humanitarian aid to prevent more famine and more disease that is happening there. An international mechanism must be set up that will begin the reconstruction of Gaza, a massive project that the UN cautions could take as long as 80 years. This must happen and Israel must be compelled. There are clear international mechanisms to compel countries to take necessary measures. These include sanctions, such as ending arms sales which must be implemented and enforced with immediate effect. The trade union movement must unite once and for all to see the establishment in law of a Palestinian state. Through a two-state solution, this allows the right of return for Palestinian refugees to address decades of oppression faced by the Palestinian

people. That way lies peace. It may sound difficult, but all it really takes is a clear political decision.

There is progress, Congress. The recent decisions in Ireland, Norway and Spain to recognise the State of Palestine joining 140 other UN Member States is a step on this road. My colleagues from the North West & Irish Region are all too familiar with the Palestinian people's struggle for freedom, decolonisation and justice. For decades the people of Ireland across both North and South have wholeheartedly stood side by side with the people of Palestine. This highly visible solidarity that Ireland has with the Palestinian people stems from fighting a similar struggle themselves with an unyielding oppressor.

When Nelson Mandela was elected as President of South Africa in 1994 he made clear that the South African's people freedom is incomplete without the freedom of Palestinians. With the history of America's civil rights movement, Malcolm X stated: "The Palestinian struggle is not just a cry for justice. It's a battle for the most fundamental of human rights that every living soul on this planet should inherit by birthright. It is unyielding resistance against an oppressive, suffocating grip of occupation and the callous denial on the most basic human dignity just as a civil rights' movement fought against racial discrimination".

The recent moves by the international bodies like the ICJ and the ICC suggest that the days of Israel's impunity are over and the world is beginning to understand that accountability is paramount. There is hope. Millions upon millions have taken to the streets, have occupied university campuses and have raised their voices peacefully in disgust and shock against their own country's complicity all around the world.

In Israel itself there is a rising protest demanding a ceasefire and for the safe return of hostages, and there is leverage, not least from the trade unions and the union members all over the world, who have always stood in solidarity and who have real power to pressure their elected governments over something crucial to our shared humanity. This is not a complex political matter. This is a moral duty to do the right thing and to stop these crimes against humanity. If Israeli leaders are not taken to task, if Israel is yet again allowed to ignore international law and international humanitarian law, if there is no accountability for war criminals, it spells the end of the international order as we know it. That is an appalling prospect for everyone. So unite your efforts, direct your anger and play our part in the global movement for justice in Palestine and justice everywhere.

Thank you for listening, Congress, and I wish you all a safe journey home.  
(A standing ovation)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you for that powerful speech. Secunder?

GORDON RICHARDSON (CEC): When people say to you “What does the CEC do?”, that’s what they do! (Applause) President and Congress, I am seconding the CEC Statement on Israel and Palestine.

Barbara said when opening this debate that we are the people who believe in peace, and there is not a conflict around the world where trade unions have not found a way somehow, somewhere, to support that cause, the cause of peace. However, peace is fragile. There are those who have lived without peace for generations. It must be secured, though, even in the darkest of moments.

This CEC Statement sets out the GMB’ support for just and lasting peace, desperately needed but denied for far too long. That peace will not last if decades of oppression, occupation, violence and a denial of human rights are left to another generation of Palestinians to overcome. But it will only be lasting when we create a space for dialogue to begin, for trust to be built and respect to be encouraged, and that’s going to be difficult. One right to live in security, safety and dignity does not negate another. A continued cycle of violence will not bring peace closer, whatever the rights and wrongs. We cannot move forward without rejecting the hateful and divisive rhetoric that drives violence abroad and racism at home.

The GMB stands with our Muslim and Jewish members, but they are members, really, because they are our friends, against the appalling increase in anti-Muslim hate and anti-Semitic attacks and abuse that the face in the UK. We will continue to offer practical solidarity to our members affected and explore where we can and offer further support. We continue to call for a peaceful outcome to decades of oppression and conflict in Palestine and Israel through a two-state solution, but not through arms and more violence. This is a long-standing policy from the GMB with numerous congresses having affirmed this year after year. Trade unions will be an essential pillar of any permanent peace and peaceful settlement. The GMB will continue to reach out and support the unity of working people across boundaries and our shared social values.

Against growing threats to democracy in Israel and the systematic denial of equal rights for Palestinians, building dialogue with civil society will also

be crucial. We will not secure peace if we don't reach out to those who stand up for it and support them on the ground in their communities in these most difficult of environments. Because when we go home tonight and back to our families, all these people are still there, where all this is happening.

With this Statement, GMB will play its full part to make that just and lasting peace a reality. Congress, I beg you to support. I second. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Gordon. It looks I have got three speakers from the regions. Would the first speaker like to come to the rostrum. I am not taking them in any specific order because not all regions are taking part.

DAVY BENSON (GMB Scotland): Congress, I'm a first-time delegate and a first-time speaker. (*Applause*) Thank you. I am speaking in support of the CEC Statement. The history of the dispute between Israel and Palestine has spanned decades and generations causing unimaginable grief to many. The attacks and abductions by Hamas on 7<sup>th</sup> October were abhorrent and cowardly. There can be no justification for them. What has followed has been one of the worst human rights abuses that many of us have seen unfold in our lives at the hand of the Israeli state. Schools and hospital bombed, aid, water and electricity withheld, and a civilian population displaced and slaughtered by one of the most well-armed militaries in the world, the majority of them being women and children. Despite the obvious horrors before our eyes, politicians across the western world have been slow to condemn these attacks, if they have at all. The UK Government has even taken the malicious step of defunding the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, thus compounding the punishment inflicted on the Palestinian people. This has been a fundamental failure of our democracy.

As a trade union we must show solidarity to Israel and Palestine and keep those links alive, and we must be vigilant at home against the right who will use these events to spread Islamophobia and anti-Semitism across our society. We must be steadfast in our stance of opposing all forms of racism and uniting the trade union movement in a common cause across the world. The bloodshed must stop, there must be a lasting peace, there must be a Palestine state and there must be a ceasefire now. Congress, please support the statement. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Davy. I call the next speaker.

NATHANIEL TETTAH (North West & Irish): I tried my best not to speak at this Congress. Just to follow on from Davy's statement, Farzana's statement and the CEC's statement, we want to say that we support it in its entirety. There is a morale duty and we have to be on the right side of history. We have to! We have seen some of the coverage on TV, whether as a witness and an active censoring of this coverage on social media and we know our media outlets very well. They have not comprehensively covered what is happening right now in Gaza.

Over the past few months it has been important to see some of the developments, and some countries that have recognised the existence of Palestine. We have to bring to our attention the suffering in that region. We have to be on the right side of history.

Currently, the UK Government is far from playing a good role, even a better role, in restricting arms to Israel. They have to restrict arms to Israel. Peace, as I have been told, is not just an absence of violence. It is crucial that it embodies equality and respect. It must not include hatred and discrimination. People deserve the right to live and work without the fear of discrimination, hatred or violence. We cannot in this room determine the right solution for the region; we cannot do that. But a ceasefire, at the very least, will allow for that discussion to take place, and it must be on that basis of respect. Let us not allow the far right in this country, and our horrible Government, divide us. Let us engage in civil discourse right now. Let us absolutely refute anti-Semitism in our streets and let us, of course, refute Islamophobia as well. But it is important that we recognise that we have to be on the right side of history. The plight of the Palestinians is truly painful to see. Let us back the CEC Statement in its entirety, and let us show solidarity here and solidarity on the streets. Thank you very much, Congress. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Nathaniel.

DAVID MAKUCH (Midlands): Congress, I am speaking on the CEC Statement on Israel and Palestine. The on-going war in Gaza is the most complicated conflict of our times. There is no other place on Earth right now where more people have died; men, women, kids and aid workers. You name them. The numbers are horrific and difficult to look at. I, myself, understand fully how hard it is to follow the news from that region, but I would like to encourage you all to read the CEC Statement. This report recognises the fact that there are casualties on both sides but the numbers of people killed in the Gaza region is shocking.



Congress, there are many reports, articles and books written about this conflict. The CEC Statement, whilst saying all the right things, in reality, does not bring to an end the unnecessary deaths of so many.

Midlands Region is asking you to support this report and all the calls stated in it, but at the same time it is asking you to remember that we have to do more. Most importantly, we must lobby our politicians to constantly increase efforts for an instant ceasefire that is breaking international law and sending more humanitarian and medical aid to Gaza. Please read the report and support the Statement. Thank you. (*Applause*)

BRIAN SHAW (London): President and Congress, speaking in support of the CEC Statement on Israel and Palestine. Can I thank Farzana for that passionate speech that she gave in terms of delivering that. You will be a loss to the Central Executive Committee as your term ends. (*Applause*)

We all condemn the attack and hostage taking undertaken by Hamas on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023. We must also condemn the response by the Israeli Government. No one can be left unmoved by the loss of life on both sides in this conflict. However, that loss is disproportionate for the people of Gaza. More than 36,000 people have been killed in Gaza and that number is only those who have been found and recorded by the Gaza authorities.

We are clear, as the London Region, bearing in mind we have the largest Jewish and Muslim communities in the union and see the rise of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic attacks and we, rightly, call them out as "racist" and stand in solidarity with those communities in opposition to these attacks. Racism has no place in this country.

We welcome the CEC's call for a two-state solution based on the United Nations resolutions. That requires international support and an in-coming Labour Government to recognise a Palestinian state. We also support the work of the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign and branches can affiliate to them as we are affiliated nationally. There must be the unconditional release of unharmed hostages taken by Hamas on 7<sup>th</sup> October as well as Palestinians held without trial in Israel. Neither side should be complicit in any war crimes and those who have committed war crimes should face that justice.

Aid should also be delivered effectively and promptly to Gaza and there must be an end to the illegal occupation of the settlements within

Palestinian territory. Israel needs to allow emergency aid to enter Gaza, including fuel, water, fuel and medical aid to stave off the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza. Now is the time for the international community to end arming Israel. Unless it ends the conflict in Gaza and seeks a lasting peace, only then can we rebuild Palestine free from oppression and have peace for both Israel and Palestine. Thank you. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Brian. Just to let you know that all motions on this subject have been withdrawn so I will go straight to the vote on the Statement. All those in favour of the CEC Statement on Israel and Palestine, please show? Thank you. Anyone against? Thank you very much.

*The CEC Statement on Israel and Palestine was CARRIED.*

## **INTERNATIONAL**

THE PRESIDENT: Congress, we were due to have the first of our two international speakers address Congress today from Medical Aid for Palestinians. They were keen to speak to you today. Unfortunately, they have been in touch and are, sadly, unable to be with us. We will be continuing our work with the charity and they have sent us their latest video from health workers on the ground in Gaza at a hospital which was shortly evacuated after recording their message. Please could the video be shown.

*(Video from Medical Aid for Palestinians shown) (A standing ovation)*

Congress, could we please show our solidarity to those medical personnel working under such incredible risk to save lives in Gaza. *(A standing ovation)*

We shall now debate our final motion of Congress 2024 under International. Could the mover and seconder of Motion 264 please come to the rostrum.

## **WELCOME PROGRESS IN COLOMBIA MOTION 264**

### **264. WELCOME PROGRESS IN COLOMBIA**

Conference extends full solidarity to the Colombian people as they strive to build a fairer and more peaceful society under the progressive government of Gustavo Petro.

Conference welcomes the government's positive measures, working closely with trade unions and civil society organisations, to tackle gender-based discrimination and strengthen women's rights.

Women in Colombia are disproportionately impacted by conflict and inequality. Conference welcomes the creation of the country's first Ministry of Equality which aims to confront historic injustices and to ensure that the rights of women, particularly those of indigenous or African-Colombian heritage, are guaranteed and respected.

Women workers still face workplace discrimination, harassment and limited opportunities. The government's proposed labour reform bill empowers women workers and prohibits discriminatory practices. In the face of strong congressional opposition, Conference expresses its committed support for the labour reform, which if passed into law will improve the lives of millions of working people.

Conference commends the many GMB branches that sent videos of support and solidarity to Colombian trade unions last October as they mobilised in support of the labour reform.

Conference pays tribute to Colombian women activists organising their communities for economic, social and environmental justice, as well as the many women community leaders at the forefront of peacebuilding. The National Women's Association visited by the GMB President during a delegation to Colombia last year are running trade union schools to promote equal representation in the movement for our trade unionist sisters.

In the peace process, women former guerrillas lead cooperatives and other economic projects. Despite conflict violence still impacting the country, they are dedicated to the immense challenge of consolidating stable and lasting peace.

Conference stands in unconditional solidarity with all those seeking to end the human rights crisis that has killed over 1,500 social activists and over 400 former guerrillas since the 2016 peace agreement.

Working with our partner organisation Justice for Colombia, Conference resolves to:

- Provide practical support to initiatives that empower women in their communities and workplaces in Colombia
- Promote Justice for Colombia campaigns at all levels of the union and invite JFC to speak at GMB unions and events

### **W15 THREE SHIRES BRANCH** **Southern Region**

*(Carried)*

MARTHA DE BRUXELLES (Southern): Congress, I am moving Motion 264: Justice for Colombia. This is my last time as a lay member moving a motion. *(Applause)* May I add my solidarity as someone from another country. Justice for Colombia has solidarity with the conflict and the people of Palestine and their struggle.

Congress, the GMB's connection with Justice for Colombia is rooted in the shocking violence making Colombia the world's most dangerous country for trade unionists and human rights activists. The election in 2022 for the first progressive government was highly welcomed in a country long impacted by violent conflict and huge inequality. Alongside the 2016 Peace Agreement the election result was due to immense grassroots organising by trade unionists, the rural community and peace activists. This historical achievement would not have been possible without the vital contribution of Colombian women. Across Colombia women have organised the workplaces and communities for fair conditions while working for former guerillas and they are at the forefront of peace building and reconciliation. Women have provided opportunities for those in the peace process as well as historically marginalised communities. Women like my sister have been working tirelessly for peace and reconciliation.

Coming from a long line of human rights and environmental activism, our Vice President, Francia Marquez, is the first black women elected into that role. She is behind efforts to tackle inequality and guarantee marginalised communities the political and social rights long denied to them. The trade union movement's support for the government is partly due to the tireless work of Labour Minister, Gloria Maria Ramirez, a former president of the Teachers' Federation. Under Gloria, our Labour Minister who has created the legislation, promises of significant improvement to the lives of working people have been made.

We are delighted to welcome another inspired woman trade unionist, Lena Muntadas, of the CUT Workers Federation. As head of young workers, Lena is responsible for co-ordinating a new generation of trade unionists to stand up for their rights, but despite this important advance Colombia faces major challenges to build lasting peace and justice. The hard right opposition is fighting in Congress to block the social reforms and threatens economic domination of the country. Their interests are in direct contrast to those of the working people. Furthermore, the previous government's disgraceful disregard for the peace process has ensured that violent conflict remains for many communities. Trade unionists, social activists and former women guerrillas are still being murdered at a shocking rate. Often it is the women who come under attack.

Conference, the GMB continues to campaign alongside Justice for Colombia to support our sisters and brothers in that country. As the official campaign for the trade union movement, Justice for Colombia carries out

international solidarity, but we can only do that with the community and your support. We ask you to provide practical support to initiatives that empower women in the community and workplaces in Colombia. We ask you to promote Justice for Colombia campaigns to all levels of the union and invite Justice for Colombia speakers at unions and events. I ask you that from the bottom of my heart. Please support this motion. Thank you. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Martha. Secunder?

DANIELLE SEYCHELLE (Southern): Congress, I am seconding Motion 264. In a world where the far right is spreading it is a relief to have a leader like Francis Marquez in South America, where the rights for trade union activists have a long way to go to be protected, especially women. We ask our GMB branches to support Justice for Colombia and the initiative between women, their workplaces and their communities. When we promote our Justice for Colombia campaigns we invite Justice for Colombia speakers to take part in our meetings and conferences. We have to hope for a better day. We are setting an example to the other countries who are still fighting for their basic rights. Thank you. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: I invite Gary Harris to give the response on behalf of the CEC, please.

GARY HARRIS (CEC): President and Congress, I am responding on behalf of the CEC to Motion 264, which we are supporting with a qualification.

GMB has long campaigned to defend trade unionism, human rights and peace in Colombia. We welcome this motion, rightly bringing into focus how decades of conflict and inequality has disproportionately impacted women of different backgrounds in Colombia. We also echo its praise for GMB branches who sent solidarity to Colombian unions marching to support its left-wing government, which has committed to eradicate gender and racial inequalities and improve workers' rights.

The CEC qualification is that we should consider further, with advice from Justice for Colombia, what specific practical support GMB could provide to empower women in the workplaces and communities. Also any financial commitments are to be subject to consideration by the CEC's Finance & General Purposes Committee as is its long-standing practice. The CEC is asking Congress to support Motion 264 with the qualifications set out. Thank you. Solidarity! *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Gary. Does Southern Region accept the qualification on Motion 264? (*Agreed*) All those in favour of Motion 264, please show? Anyone against? That is carried.

### **SPEAKER – JUSTICE FOR COLOMBIA**

THE PRESIDENT: It gives me great pleasure to invite our international speaker to address Congress, Lina Montilla Diaz, from the CUT trade union federation in Colombia. I was very lucky as I had the privilege to go to Colombia with Jack in April of last year, and the words that we heard from everyone who we met there was hope, hope that the left-wing progressive government can deliver total peace to the country. Lina will now tell us about the situation there and Mick will translate for us.

LINA MONTILLA DIAZ (CUT, Colombia) (Translated): Hello. I bring warm greetings from the CUT Colombian Trade Union Federation, a workers' congress that day after day fights for decent work, democracy and peace with social justice for the Colombian people.

It is great to be here. My name is Lina Montilla Diaz, a teacher and a National Executive member of the CUT Colombia where I am Director of the Department for Young Members and the Eradication of Child Labour. I extend a warm hug and gratitude to GMB President, Barbara Plant, who visited Colombia last year on a Justice for Colombia delegation as well as all GMB delegates and Executive Committee of the GMB. I congratulate you on this Congress and the long-standing struggles that you have fought on behalf of your members. (*Applause*)

Of course, I also pay tribute to your union's committed support for trade union rights, human rights and peace through your work with Justice for Colombia since the GMB was a co-founder of Justice for Colombia over 20 years ago.

This is a historic political moment in Colombia which has brought international attention to our situation as, for the first time, we have elected a progressive government. This is thanks to the social and permanent mass mobilisation of the Colombian people. These social mobilisations were the largest that Colombia had seen in decades. They particularly took place in November 2019 and then again in April 2021 after the pandemic. These massive protests were against inequality and violence as we took to the streets fighting and resisting for almost 90 days from April

2021. Soon afterwards, in 2022, this public anger at the system was expressed at voting booths as we elected a people's mandate in the form of President Gustavo Petro and Vice President Francia Marquez. However, our government today faces serious obstacles to its progressive agenda. There are strong concerns of an illegal coup to remove the government from office that are being led by right-wing opposition parties, the business class, the corporate media and others who seek, at all costs, to torpedo the arrival of progressive policies that benefit the Colombian people.

Therefore, it is important to state that as a trade union movement we continue to defend the Colombian people's right to life, peace and democracy. We support the government's ambitious social reforms as these are fundamental demands of trade unions, social movements and mass mobilisations, especially in the last 30 years of neo-liberalism in Colombia. Our basic demands are for decent healthcare, universal pensions, decent and dignified work, education as a fundamental right and good quality public services at a low cost.

However, these fair and basic initiatives that are supported by the majority of people have been blocked by Opposition Congress members, who want to preserve their privileges and will do anything to prevent laws that prioritise the people's interests over their own.

I would also like to mention the Campaign for Peace in Colombia. The government has developed a policy called "Total Peace", which aims to reach peace agreements through negotiations with different armed groups that are still active in Colombia, such as the ELN guerilla movement, dissident groups and others. At the same time, the government is making important efforts to advance implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement between the Colombian state and the FARC guerilla movement that was so strongly backed by trade unions in Britain and elsewhere, including the GMB. But, shockingly, since the signing of this agreement in 2016 more than 400 former guerillas in the peace process have been murdered, including 10 since the start of 2024. Furthermore, killings of social activists, including trade unionists, community leaders and indigenous leaders are still being committed regularly. Since 2016 at least 1,366 activists have been murdered, with virtually all of these crimes going unpunished. Armed conflict has again escalated between dissident groups, the ELN guerillas and right-wing paramilitary groups.

That is why we support the government's Total Peace Policy and keep striving for peace with social justice because peace is not only the silencing

of guns but it is also the guarantee of a dignified life for all. That is also why the trade union movement organises tirelessly in support of peace. Today our movement is representing civil society in peace talks with the ELN guerillas. Also the FECODE Teacher Trade Union Federation, the main trade union congresses and the government are establishing a form of reparations for the trade union movement over all the violence it has suffered collectively during the armed conflict. *(Applause)*

That is why from this platform and in the name of the CUT Colombia Trade Union Federation we ask the international community to unite its voice with ours to say “No” to the soft coup against the Colombian government, that the Colombian Congress legislates in favour of the people and not the business class, that peace and social justice become a reality for everyone in Colombia and that public and decent education is at the service of the people and not the markets.

Finally, I want again to thank the GMB and everyone here for your solidarity, for listening to these words and for your interest in my beautiful country. Thanks also to Justice for Colombia for its solidarity work with the CUTs, with Colombian trade unionism and with peace in Colombia.

I invite you to affiliate your branches to Justice for Colombia as it is only with trade union backing that they can keep supporting the struggle for peace in Colombia. It is also your support that allows trade unionists and social activists, like myself, to stand in front of you to speak to you today about the country of enchantment, of coffee and of orchids. Sooner rather than later we hope it will be the country that we dream of.

As a woman, feminist, trade unionist and human rights defender, I invite everyone here to be part of this wonderful process of international solidarity that today provides a platform for the voices of Colombian trade unionism to tell the world what is happening in our country. It is this fundamental principle that, as trade unionists, we share all around the world – the solidarity of the working class. Thank you very much to all of you. *(A standing ovation)*

*(Standing ovation)*

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Lina, for coming to our Congress and please take our solidarity back to Colombia.



## **OMNIBUS VOTE OF THANKS**

THE PRESIDENT: I would now like to invite Donna Spicer from Southern Region to move the Omnibus Vote of Thanks on behalf of the CEC. Thank you, Donna.

DONNA SPICER (Southern): President, Congress, Donna Spicer, Southern Region, and adopted London member. I am proud to be delivering the closing vote of thanks on behalf of the CEC whilst in Southern Region. Many thanks to my Regional Committee for giving me this opportunity. It has been a tumultuous tasking month for the CEC but, hopefully, we have turned the corner and let us hope we are back to moving forwards and being the great union that we are.

I would like to thank my fellow CEC comrades for being strong and honest for standing up and speaking out and fighting for fairness and transparency whilst staying true to their beliefs. (*Applause*) It has not been easy for some but we have come through. Thanks to the CEC members whose terms have come to an end. Your dedication to this union has been invaluable, particularly the last four years which, if we are honest, has not been an easy task. In the words of the General Secretary, "Your legacy will live on." We wish you well and you will not be forgotten. (*Applause*)

A thank you to, you, the lay members, for engaging in the recent CEC elections and voting for the next CEC delegation. We look forward to the new delegates staking up their role and we cannot wait to work alongside you to keep our union a great strong union to belong to. (*Applause*)

On this note, I would like to give special thanks to the legend that is our Vice President, Malcolm Sage. (*Applause*) Malcolm has been on the CEC for almost 30 years and Vice President for 20 of those. Malcolm, you have been a stalwart on the CEC. You have a very particular set of skills and your own unique way of chairing the CEC meetings, and the top table at Congress. One of the first tasks for the new CEC may be to consider if an extra day was needed to be added to Congress 2025. You will be a tough act to follow, Malcolm. We will truly miss you and we give you our heartfelt thanks and our very best wishes for the future. (*Standing ovation*)

All right. I've only got six minutes! A special thanks to the National Office staff, Steve Short, Laurence Turner, Anna Barnes, Gavin Sibthorpe, Ross Holden, Casse Farmer, Sangeeta Gilani, for planning and organising

Congress. To the National Office staff on reception, including Pat Gannon and Ann Campbell, Kevin Panton, and Bob Robinson for the Internet Café, and to the irreplaceable Hilary Perrin for the Exhibition area. Let's not forget all the unseen national staff who do a fantastic job behind the scenes to support the smooth running of the union across the whole year. Apologies if I have missed anyone off the list.

Thank you to the venue staff here at the BIC, the stewards, the catering staff, and all the organisations running the stalls. Thanks to Barry Smith, Karen Dudley, and everyone on the Standing Orders Committee, locked away in a darkened room throughout the week and working hard to keep us all on track.

Most of all, Congress, we would like to give thanks to you, the lay members, those who hold rule book and branch positions, and our delegates, this week has been about you. We are a member-led union and without you all there would be no union. (*Applause*)

We have heard some passionate motions and speeches from first time delegates and members on industrial and workplace matters but also on some important social issues. Our industrial campaigns are getting better and better and we have seen continued industrial action across the regions: Asda, G4S, Amazon, Tata Steel, the Birmingham Equal Pay predominantly for school support staff, public sector staff including school support staff in Northern Ireland, and the SEND campaign in Leeds, to name but a few. (*Applause*)

The brilliant march through the town up to Asda yesterday was a fantastic way to show support and spend an afternoon stitching it to that bunch of *bleeps*, and you can fill in the bleep. The whole of Congress, delegates, staff, officers, visitors, guests, and stallholders, all came together in solidarity. It was a special highlight we should think about repeating next year somewhere.

Your motions tell us what is important to you. They tell us about your wins, your highs, your lows, your struggles and the emotions that come with them. We have heard about poo in the sea and we even met a fat-cat cat. We always enjoy hearing from the reps themselves and we have heard from our Amazon workers, school support staff, women's health and safety at Hinckley Point C, and our care workers. Your passion is what carried this union through tough times.

Congress, GMB business does not stop once you leave here today. Not only do we have an election to win but now is when the hard work begins, actioning your motions and getting the campaigns up and running, that you bring here and mean the most to you and the membership, growing the union, building our collective strength and helping our members to make work better for themselves.

Congress is also about the events happening behind the scenes. We are all aware of the election that is happening in a few weeks' time, thanks to the National Policy Forum, GMB played a key role in telling them in what direction we want the Labour Party to travel in. Let's make sure we get a Labour government back in power and that their policies are our policies and that our members' voices are heard across all our industries.

*(Applause)*

This year has been our first ever cohort of GRASP ambassadors and I am sure, like you, I am excited to see who the next GRASP cohort will be. Thank you to Tyehimba Nosakhere, for supporting and guiding the group of fabulous members to be the best they can be within our union. *(Applause)*

Finally, thank you to Gary and Barbara, not just for all their hard work in the run-up to and right throughout Congress but also for standing beside the members and showing them that belonging to a union means something and this wonderful union, our union, supports them through their fight and struggles no matter what, whether for better pay, terms and conditions, to be recognised, or for whatever it is that is right and just.

In the words of our founder, Will Thorne, "There is a world of freedom, beauty, and equality to gain where everyone will have an opportunity to express the best that is in them for the benefit of all, making the world a better place, more to our hearts' desire, and the better to dwell in."

Good luck to you all, keep on organising, keep on agitating and, most of all, keep on fighting until the fat cats grumble. Colleagues, I look forward to seeing you next time in Brighton under a Labour government. Yeeees!

*(Standing ovation)*

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Donna, for that rousing vote of thanks.

## **END OF CONGRESS VIDEO**

THE PRESIDENT: We now get to an end of Congress Video. Who knows what is going to be in it, or who is going to appear on it. I have no idea.

*Video played to Congress.*

## **GENERAL SECRETARY CLOSING SPEECH**

THE PRESIDENT: Brilliant. I now call on our General Secretary, Gary Smith, to give a closing speech to Congress.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: Congress, I will try to keep this brief because I am probably feeling a bit like all of you. First of all, a belated set of apologies in today from Tom and Regan Rednall from London, they could not be with us this week, they got married and I believe they are watching online. Congratulations to both of you. *(Applause)*

In that vein, I believe Sam, who is with the National Administration Unit, I do not know if you are in the hall, Sam, but I believe you got engaged this weekend as well so congratulations to you as well. *(Applause)*

Moving forward on to Donna, I have to say a few thank you's as well to the Standing Orders Committee, Karen, Barry, the whole team of the SOC, take a bow. You are brilliant. Thank you. *(Applause)*

To Davey and Bob, who are the observers to the SOC and have been stuck in that darkened room all week as well. Thank you to yourselves. Thank you. *(Applause)*

To our verbatim shorthand writers, Michael and Phyllis, thank you for your patience and endurance, and the work that you do is really, really important in terms of keeping a record for Congress so thank you. *(Applause)*

There is the Creche, Exhibit World, and U2 events, all of who played a really important part in making sure Congress goes smoothly this week. We really, really appreciate your contribution and the conference hall staff have been so friendly, so obliging, so helpful all week. Thank you. *(Applause)*

To the BSL interpreters, we really appreciate your company every year and thanks for your work. Thank you. (*Applause*)

Gary, Phil, the team, T5, we look forward to seeing you every year. You do a fantastic job for us, the staging, all the rest of it, you go the extra mile for us and we really, really appreciate all your efforts. Thanks to Team from T5 (*Applause*)

All the exhibitors who make a contribution, help bring this whole event to life and some make a financial contribution as well. We really appreciate the part that you play in our Congress.

Hilary Perrin, who puts on the event, puts on the exhibition, Hilary keeps talking about retiring, she says this will be her last year, I hope it is not going to be, Hilary. Please say a big thank you to all the exhibitors, and especially to the wonderful Hilary Perrin. (*Applause*)

To the GMB stewards and again on that vein of retiring, Sam keeps threatening to retire every year. Sam, one more year, one more year, brother. One more year. Sam and Ian, brilliant. Thank you for your hospitality, your friendship, your comradeship. I am not going to mention everybody by name but our General Member Auditors we really appreciate your work, to the NAU staff who have travelled down from Scotland, thank you, we really, really appreciate your efforts. You are never forgotten about. I work in the NAU, it is a great, great team of people. (*Applause*)

Donna mentioned the National Office staff who make this – again I am sorry, I will not mention everybody but Sangeeta, thank you, Pat, Ann, and Lauren, who sits in a darkened room all week punching stuff into the computer for us. Really appreciate your contribution and to everybody in the National Office, what a part you play in this event. Steve and Kevin, who are behind the scenes for the whole Congress, they burrow away, they will be here tomorrow tidying up and cleaning up after us and getting packed up. Thank you very much, year in, year out, you are a special part of this Union. (*Applause*)

We have a slight change in the team that has been doing the work at Congress this year, Laurence Turner is standing for Parliament, the political team Gavin, he is away doing general election work, but Anna, Ross, Cassie, what a role you play, what a part you have played this year. You have been absolutely outstanding. (*Applause*) Thank you.

To the Comms team, thank you very, very much for the part you have played, some great coverage; trying to get a cut through in a general election period is tough but some great film there at the end, some great cuts there. Thank you to the whole Comms team.

For myself, I said it the other day, and I want to say it again, Malcolm, you are a great friend and comrade, and what a contribution you have made to this organisation. Thank you, brother. Thank you. (*Applause*)

Barbara, as ever, guiding us through this long week. I know it is an arduous job, I know you love it, I know you get fantastic energy from everybody. I know what hard work it is both in running Congress and actually being here. Barbara, thank you for guiding us and thank for presiding over us this week. What a fantastic job you have done again. Thank you. (*Applause*)

Congress, I do end the week here feeling somewhat tired, it was a long week running up to Congress this year with negotiations over the manifesto, you will see this tomorrow, you will see the outcome of that – is it today or tomorrow – today. Time is slipping away from me. I genuinely leave the Congress and I hope you will be feeling hugely energised as well. I just want to say, above all, thank you for all your contributions this week, particularly the first time delegates, I hope you have enjoyed your Congress and I hope you got a real feel for what this union is about and you are going to go back and redouble your efforts. Thank you each and every one of you for the part you have played this week. Thank you. (*Applause*)

To London Region, I want to thank you for bringing down the band yesterday and maybe for having the idea of having the demonstration in the first place, I am obviously taking credit for it now, but thank you to London Region for getting the team down here yesterday. Really special. (*Applause*)

Everybody from Southern Region, you pulled that together at very, very short notice. I know there was a whole team who were involved. Justin, please pass on our very best wishes to everybody involved; absolutely outstanding yesterday. I thought it was a terrific day. (*Applause*)

Congress, I have to put my thoughts together, there has been a few days where we have showed everyone the incredible strength of our GMB family and it reminds us that when we come here we are part of something big and something very, very special: our Asda members fighting every day,

fighting against these awful people who now own this business and seem to be intent on draining the life out of it.

I better mention the National Care Committee, a fantastic job you have done fighting for SSP and HC1 and we are going to go from strength to strength this year and we are going to get through the £15 barrier across the care sector.

Our team from manufacturing, honestly, we are going to fight to bring those jobs home. Our communities need it, the country needs it, and we are absolutely going to stand in solidarity with that fight.

Our members in construction, what a job you are doing across the country and we heard all the great work that is going at Hinckley Point.

Across our public services, our ambulance service, our health service, and our schools, the fights that we have undertaken are just something else.

In terms of equal pay, I am so proud, we gave that commitment a couple of years ago in Harrogate that we were going to take this fight on and we are going from strength to strength fighting the corner with working class women across this country and ending the wage theft.

Across the UK we really are listening, building, organising campaigns and we are winning as well. There is so much to celebrate and we have celebrated this week, but we also have to recognise that we have a long, long way to go to be the union that we all aspire to be. We heard a lot about inclusion and solidarity, well, we have a way to go but I say this on behalf of the whole leadership of the union, we are going to build a truly inclusive, a truly representative, and a truly anti-racist union in GMB.

*(Applause)*

We were all inspired by the work within GRASP but I give you this commitment again on behalf of everybody in a leadership position in this union, GRASP and all we are doing around inequalities and inclusion this is a start, it's not the end, and we have much, much more work to do and you are going to have the support of us every single step of the way.

*(Applause)*

A note to Congress is that we are standing on a moment of history, we really are on the cusp of a historic moment. There is going to be a profound change within this country in the next few weeks and the Tories

are going to be out and we absolutely celebrate that fact. (*Applause*) But I do say this to you as well, Congress, there are no political super heroes, there are no political panaceas, there are no shortcuts. Our job when we leave here is, yes, to get a Labour Government elected but to keep listening to our members, keep organising and keep campaigning because that is how working class people win.

Every one of you are in a leadership position within our union. I want you to reflect on that fact. You are sent here to represent our amazing members and that is a huge responsibility, and nothing demonstrates your decency, your integrity, your courage, more than the way that you have risen to the moment this week, the way you have re-forged the bonds that hold us together as a union. I said on Sunday it is okay to have a disagreement, that is what happens in families, but what we have shown is our disagreements can be shared with consideration and respect.

Above all, we have told each other the historic truth that has been handed down through generations in this union throughout our 135-year history, this proud beautiful old organisation is bigger than any one of us. (*Applause*) You have done this. You have led the way. You have brought our family back together again this week.

Friends, let me say this as well. There are threats to us as an organisation because there are people who want to attack us. There are people who want to hold working class people back. There are those in this country who do not want change. We can and should expect more attacks from the Tories right-wing media in the days and weeks to come. It will intensify as we run up to the general election and that moment of change.

My message to the Tories, to the media machine, and to everyone and anyone from our movement or those even from our own difficult past, if you choose to work with our enemies, even if you choose to undermine us, be clear, this union is united, we are strong, and when we are strong and united you will never beat GMB. (*Applause*)

There is much still to be done but we have done so much turning this union round from a few years ago. Long may it go, much to do, but we will emerge from this Congress a better and stronger union because of your fantastic contribution. Solidarity, everybody. See you next year. (*Standing ovation*)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Gary. Congress, please stand for *The Red Flag*.



*Congress sang The Red Flag.*

*Three cheers.*

THE PRESIDENT: There is one quick notice before you go. Can all members of the new CEC please gather at the side of the stage for a very quick hello.

Friends, colleagues, comrades, thank you for a fantastic week. I can now officially close Congress. Safe journeys home, everybody. (*Applause*)

*Congress concluded.*